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TWO APOLOGIES,

ONE FOR

CHRISTIANITY,

IN

A SERIES OF LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO

EDWARD GIBBON, ESQ.

THE OTHER FOR

THE BIBLE,

IN ANSWER TO

THOMAS PAINE.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

TWO SERMONS, AND A CHARGE,

IN DEFENCE OF

REVEALED RELIGION.

BY RICHARD WATSON, D.D. F.R.S.
LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF, AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

London:

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1816.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

All the contents of this volume have been so repeatedly brought before the Public, that I had no intention of printing another edition of any of them.

Understanding, however, that the Booksellers had it in contemplation to publish The Apology for Christianity, and The Apology for the Bible, in one octavo volume, from the expectation of its becoming what they call a standard work, I have thought it might be useful to subjoin to the Apologies two Sermons, and a Charge, originally published in Defence of Revealed Religion in 1795.

R. L.

Calgarth Park,
Sept. 28, 1805.

The favorable manner in which the former edition was received by the Public, have induced the proprietors to print a new edition, in which a few errors of the press are corrected.

February, 1816.

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AN

APOLOGY

FOR

CHRISTIANITY,

IN

A SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

EDWARD GIBBON, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF THE HISTORY OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

Seventh Edition.

I KNOW not whether I may be allowed, without the imputation of vanity, to express the satisfaction I felt on being told by my Bookseller, that another Edition of the Apology for Christianity was wanted. It is a satisfaction, however, in which vanity has no part; it is altogether founded in the delightful hope, that I may have been, in a small degree, instrumental in recommending the Religion of Christ to the attention of some, who might not otherwise have considered it, with that serious and unprejudiced disposition which its importance requires.

The celebrity of the work which gave rise to this Apology, has, no doubt, principally contributed to its circulation: could I have entertained a thought, that it would have been called for so many years after its first publication, I would have endeavoured

to have rendered it more intrinsically worthy the public regard. It becomes not me however to depreciate what the world has approved; rather let me express an earnest wish, that those who dislike not this little Book, will peruse larger ones on the same subject: in them they will see the defects of this so abundantly supplied, as will, I trust, convince them, that the Christian Religion is not a system of superstition, invented by enthusiasts, and patronised by statesmen, for secular ends, but a revelation of the will of God.

LONDON,
March 10, 1791.

AN APOLOGY

FOR

CHRISTIANITY.

LETTER I.

SIR,

It would give me much uneasiness to be reputed an enemy to free inquiry in religious matters, or as capable of being animated into any degree of personal malevolence against those who differ from me in opinion. On the contrary, I look upon the right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, as superior to the controul of human authority; and have ever regarded free disquisition as the best mean of illustrating the doctrine, and establishing the truth of Christianity. Let the followers of Mahomet, and the zealots of the church of Rome, support their several religious systems by damping every effort of the human intellect to pry into the foundations of their faith: but never can it become a Christian, to be afraid of being asked *a reason of the faith that is in him;* nor a Protestant, to be studious of

enveloping his religion in mystery and ignorance; nor the church of England, to abandon that moderation by which she permits every individual *et sentire quæ velit, et quæ sentiat dicere.*

It is not, Sir, without some reluctance, that, under the influence of these opinions, I have prevailed upon myself to address these letters to you; and you will attribute to the same motive my not having given you this trouble sooner. I had moreover an expectation, that the task would have been undertaken by some person capable of doing greater justice to the subject, and more worthy of your attention. Perceiving, however, that the two last chapters, the fifteenth in particular, of your very laborious and classical history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, had made upon many an impression not at all advantageous to Christianity; and that the silence of others, of the clergy especially, began to be looked upon as an acquiescence in what you had therein advanced; I have thought it my duty, with the utmost respect and goodwill towards you, to take the liberty of suggesting to your consideration a few remarks upon some of the passages which have

been esteemed (whether you meant that they should be so esteemed or not) as powerfully militating against that revelation, which still is to many, what it formerly was *to the Greeks—foolishness;* but which we deem to be true, to *be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*

To the inquiry by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth, you rightly answer, By the evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its Author. But afterwards, in assigning for this astonishing event five secondary causes, derived from the passions of the human heart and the general circumstances of mankind, you seem to some to have insinuated, that Christianity, like other impostures, might have made its way in the world, though its origin had been as human as the means by which you suppose it was spread. It is no wish or intention of mine, to fasten the odium of this insinuation upon you: I shall simply endeavour to shew, that the causes you produce are either inadequate to the attainment of the end proposed; or that their efficiency,

great as you imagine it, was derived from other principles than those you have thought proper to mention.

Your first cause is, " the inflexible, and, if you may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses."—Yes, Sir, we are agreed that the zeal of the Christians was inflexible; *neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,* could bend it into a separation *from the love of God, which was in Christ Jesus their Lord:* it was an inflexible obstinacy, in not blaspheming the name of Christ, which everywhere exposed them to persecution; and which even your amiable and philosophic Pliny thought proper, for want of other crimes, to punish with death in the Christians of his province.—We are agreed, too, that the zeal of the Christians was intolerant; for it denounced *tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that did evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile:* it would not tolerate in Christian

worship those who supplicated the image of Cæsar, who bowed down at the altars of Paganism, who mixed with the votaries of Venus, or wallowed in the filth of Bacchanalian festivals.

But though we are thus far agreed with respect to the inflexibility and intolerance of Christian zeal, yet, as to the principle from which it was derived, we are *toto cœlo* divided in opinion. You deduce it from the Jewish religion; I would refer it to a more adequate and a more obvious source, a full persuasion of the truth of Christianity. What! think you that it was a zeal derived from the unsocial spirit of Judaism, which inspired Peter with courage to upbraid the whole people of the Jews in the very capital of Judæa, with having *delivered up Jesus, with having denied him in the presence of Pilate, with having desired a murderer to be granted them in his stead, with having killed the Prince of life?* Was it from this principle that the same Apostle in conjunction with John, when summoned, not before the dregs of the people (whose judgments they might have been supposed capable of misleading, and whose resentment they might have despised), but before the rulers and the elders

and the scribes, the dread tribunal of the Jewish nation, and commanded by them to teach no more in the name of Jesus—boldly answered, *that they could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard? They had seen with their eyes, they had handled with their hands, the word of life;* and no human jurisdiction could deter them from being faithful witnesses of what they had seen and heard. Here then you may perceive the genuine and undoubted origin of that zeal, which you ascribe to what appears to me a very insufficient cause; and which the Jewish rulers were so far from considering as the ordinary effect of their religion, that they were exceedingly at a loss how to account for it:—*now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled.* The Apostles, heedless of consequences, and regardless of every thing but truth, openly everywhere professed themselves witnesses of the resurrection of Christ; and with a confidence which could proceed from nothing but conviction, and which pricked the Jews to the heart, bade *the house of Israel know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

I mean not to produce these instances of apostolic zeal as direct proofs of the truth of Christianity; for every religion, nay, every absurd sect of every religion, has had its zealots, who have not scrupled to maintain their principles at the expense of their lives: and we ought no more to infer the truth of Christianity from the mere zeal of its propagators, than the truth of Mahometanism from that of a Turk. When a man suffers himself to be covered with infamy, pillaged of his property, and dragged at last to the block or the stake, rather than give up his opinion: the proper inference is, not that his opinion is true, but that he believes it to be true; and a question of serious discussion immediately presents itself—upon what foundation has he built his belief? This is often an intricate inquiry, including in it a vast compass of human learning: a Bramin or a Mandarin, who should observe a missionary attesting the truth of Christianity with his blood, would, notwithstanding, have a right to ask many questions, before it could be expected that he should give an assent to our faith. In the case indeed of the Apostles, the inquiry would be much less perplexed; since it would briefly resolve itself into this—whether they were

credible reporters of facts which they themselves professed to have seen:—and it would be an easy matter to shew, that their zeal in attesting what they were certainly competent to judge of, could not proceed from any alluring prospect of worldly interest or ambition, or from any other probable motive than a love of truth.

But the credibility of the Apostles' testimony, or their competency to judge of the facts which they relate, is not now to be examined; the question before us simply relates to the principle by which their zeal was excited: and it is a matter of real astonishment to me, that any one conversant with the history of the first propagation of Christianity, acquainted with the opposition it every where met with from the people of the Jews, and aware of the repugnancy which must ever subsist between its tenets and those of Judaism, should ever think of deriving the zeal of the primitive Christians from the Jewish religion.

Both Jew and Christian, indeed, believed in one God, and abominated idolatry; but this detestation of idolatry, had it been unaccompa-

nied with the belief of the resurrection of Christ, would probably have been just as inefficacious in exciting the zeal of the Christians to undertake the conversion of the Gentile world, as it had for ages been in exciting that of the Jew. But supposing, what I think you have not proved, and what I am certain cannot be admitted without proof, that a zeal derived from the Jewish religion inspired the first Christians with fortitude to oppose themselves to the institutions of Paganism; what was it that encouraged them to attempt the conversion of their own countrymen? Amongst the Jews they met with no superstitious observances of idolatrous rites; and therefore amongst them could have no opportunity of "declaring and confirming their zealous opposition to Polytheism, or of fortifying by frequent protestations their attachment to the Christian faith." Here then, at least, the cause you have assigned for Christian zeal ceases to operate; and we must look out for some other principle than a zeal against idolatry, or we shall never be able satisfactorily to explain the ardour with which the Apostles pressed the disciples of Moses to become the disciples of Christ.

Again, does a determined opposition to, and an open abhorrence of every the minutest part of an established religion appear to you to be the most likely method of conciliating to another faith those who profess it? The Christians, you contend, could neither mix with the Heathens in their convivial entertainments, nor partake with them in the celebration of their solemn festivals; they could neither associate with them in their hymeneal nor funeral rites; they could not cultivate their arts, or be spectators of their shows; in short, in order to escape the rites of Polytheism, they were in your opinion obliged to renounce the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of life. Now, how such an extravagant and intemperate zeal as you here describe, can, humanly speaking, be considered as one of the chief causes of the quick propagation of Christianity, in opposition to all the established powers of Paganism, is a circumstance I can by no means comprehend. The Jesuit missionaries, whose human prudence no one will question, were quite of a contrary way of thinking; and brought a deserved censure upon themselves for not scrupling to propagate the faith of Christ, by indulging to their Pagan

converts a frequent use of idolatrous ceremonies. Upon the whole it appears to me, that the Christians were in no wise indebted to the Jewish religion for the zeal with which they propagated the gospel amongst Jews as well as gentiles; and that such a zeal as you describe, let its principle be what you please, could never have been devised by any human understanding as a probable mean of promoting the progress of a reformation in religion, much less could it have been thought of or adopted by a few ignorant and unconnected men.

In expatiating upon this subject you have taken an opportunity of remarking, that "the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference the most amazing miracles—and that, in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, that singular people (the Jews) seems to have yielded a stronger and more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors than to the evidence of their own senses." This observation bears hard upon the veracity of the Jewish Scriptures; and, was it true, would force us either to reject them, or to admit a position as extraordinary as

a miracle itself—that the testimony of others produced in the human mind a stronger degree of conviction, concerning a matter of fact, than the testimony of the senses themselves. It happens however, in the present case, that we are under no necessity of either rejecting the Jewish Scriptures, or of admitting such an absurd position; for the fact is not true, that the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua beheld with careless indifference the miracles related in the Bible to have been performed in their favour. That these miracles were not sufficient to awe the Israelites into an uniform obedience to the Theocracy, cannot be denied; but whatever reasons may be thought best adapted to account for the propensity of the Jews to idolatry, and their frequent defection from the worship of the One true God, "a stubborn incredulity" cannot be admitted as one of them.

To men, indeed, whose understandings have been enlightened by the Christian revelation, and enlarged by all the aids of human learning; who are under no temptations to idolatry from without, and whose reason from within would revolt at the idea of worshipping the infinite

Author of the universe under any created symbol;—to men who are compelled, by the utmost exertion of their reason, to admit as an irrefragable truth, what puzzles the first principles of all reasoning—the eternal existence of an uncaused Being; and who are conscious that they cannot give a full account of any one phænomenon in nature, from the rotation of the great orbs of the universe to the germination of a blade of grass, without having recourse to him as the primary incomprehensible cause of it;—and who, from seeing him every where, have, by a strange fatality (converting an excess of evidence into a principle of disbelief,) at times doubted concerning his existence any where, and made the very universe their God;—to men of such a stamp, it appears almost an incredible thing, that any human being which had seen the order of nature interrupted, or the uniformity of its course suspended, though but for a moment, should ever afterwards lose the impression of reverential awe which they apprehend would have been excited in their minds. But whatever effect the visible interposition of the Deity might have in removing the scepticism, or con-

firming the faith of a few philosophers, it is with me a very great doubt, whether the people in general of our days would be more strongly affected by it than they appear to have been in the days of Moses.

Was any people under heaven to escape the certain destruction impending over them, from the close pursuit of an enraged and irresistible enemy, by seeing the waters of the ocean *becoming a wall to them on their right hand and on their left;* they would, I apprehend, be agitated by the very same passions we are told the Israelites were, when they saw the sea returning to his strength, and swallowing up the host of Pharaoh; they *would fear the Lord, they would believe the Lord,* and they would express their faith and their fear by praising the Lord:—they would not behold such a great work with *careless indifference,* but with astonishment and terror; nor would you be able to detect the slightest vestige of *stubborn incredulity* in their song of gratitude. No length of time would be able to blot from their minds the memory of such a transaction, or induce a doubt concerning its Author; though

future hunger and thirst might make them call out for water and bread, with a desponding and rebellious importunity.

But it was not at the Red Sea only that the Israelites regarded with something more than a *careless indifference* the amazing miracles which God had wrought; for, when the law was declared to them from mount Sinai, *all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the tempest, and the mountains smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off: and they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*—This again, Sir, is the Scripture account of the language of the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua; and I leave it to you to consider whether this is the language of *stubborn incredulity and careless indifference.*

We are told in Scripture, too, that whilst any of the *contemporaries* of Moses and Joshua were alive, the whole people served the Lord: the impression which a sight of the miracles had made, was never effaced—nor the obedience, which might have been expected as a natural

consequence, refused—till Moses and Joshua, and all their contemporaries, were gathered unto their fathers; till *another generation after them arose, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.* But *the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel.*

I am far from thinking you, Sir, unacquainted with Scripture, or desirous of sinking the weight of its testimony; but as the words of the history from which you must have derived your observation, will not support you in imputing *careless indifference* to the contemporaries of Moses, or *stubborn incredulity* to the forefathers of the Jews, I know not what can have induced you to pass so severe a censure upon them, except that you look upon a lapse into idolatry as a proof of infidelity. In answer to this I would remark, that with equal soundness of argument we ought to infer, that every one who transgresses a religion, disbelieves it; and that every individual, who in any community incurs civil pains and penalties, is a disbeliever of the existence of the authority

by which they are inflicted. The sanctions of the Mosaic law were, in your opinion, terminated within the narrow limits of this life; in that particular, then, they must have resembled the sanctions of all other civil laws: *transgress and die* is the language of every one of them, as well as that of Moses; and I know not what reason we have to expect that the Jews, who were animated by the same hopes of temporal rewards, impelled by the same fears of temporal punishments, with the rest of mankind, should have been so singular in their conduct, as never to have listened to the clamours of passion before the still voice of reason; as never to have preferred a present gratification of sense, in the lewd celebration of idolatrous rites, before the rigid observance of irksome ceremonies.

Before I release you from the trouble of this Letter, I cannot help observing, that I could have wished you had furnished your reader with Limborch's answers to the objections of the Jew Orobio, concerning the perpetual obligation of the law of Moses. You have indeed mentioned Limborch with respect, in a short note; but though you have studiously put into the mouths

of the Judaising Christians in the apostolic days, and with great strength inserted in your text, whatever has been said by Orobio or others against Christianity, from the supposed perpetuity of the Mosaic dispensation; yet you have not favoured us with any one of the numerous replies which have been made to these seemingly strong objections. You are pleased, it is true, to say, "that the industry of our learned divines has abundantly explained the ambiguous language of the Old Testament, and the ambiguous conduct of the apostolic teachers." It requires, Sir, no learned industry to explain what is so obvious and so express, that he who runs may read it. The language of the Old Testament is this: *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.* This, methinks, is a clear and solemn declaration—there is no ambiguity at all in it—that the covenant with Moses was not to be perpetual, but was in some future time to give way to a *new covenant.* I will not detain you with an explanation of what Moses

himself has said upon this subject; but you may try, if you please, whether you can apply the following declaration, which Moses made to the Jews, to any prophet or succession of prophets, with the same propriety that you can to Jesus Christ:—*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me: unto him shall ye hearken.* If you think this ambiguous or obscure, I answer, That it is not a history, but a prophecy, and, as such, unavoidably liable to some degree of obscurity, till interpreted by the event.

Nor was the conduct of the Apostles more ambiguous than the language of the Old Testament: they did not indeed at first comprehend the whole of the nature of the new dispensation; and when they did understand it better, they did not think proper upon every occasion to use their Christian liberty; but, with true Christian charity, accommodated themselves in matters of indifference to the prejudices of their weaker brethren. But he who changes his conduct with a change of sentiments, proceeding from an increase of knowledge, is not ambiguous in his conduct; nor should he be accused of a culpable

duplicity, who in a matter of the last importance endeavours to conciliate the good-will of all, by conforming in a few innocent observances to the particular persuasions of different men.

One remark more, and I have done. In your account of the Gnostics, you have given us a very minute catalogue of the objections which they made to the authority of Moses, from his account of the creation, of the patriarchs, of the law, and of the attributes of the Deity. I have not leisure to examine whether the Gnostics of former ages really made all the objections you have mentioned; I take it for granted, upon your authority, that they did: but I am certain, if they did, that the Gnostics of modern times have no reason to be puffed up with their knowledge, or to be had in admiration as men of subtile penetration or refined erudition: they are all miserable copiers of their brethren of antiquity; and neither Morgan, nor Tindal, nor Bolingbroke, nor Voltaire, have been able to produce scarce a single new objection. You think that the Fathers have not properly answered the Gnostics. I make no question, Sir, you are able to answer them to your own satisfaction,

and informed of every thing that has been said by our *industrious divines* upon the subject; and we should have been glad, if it had fallen in with your plan to have administered together with the poison its antidote: but since that is not the case, lest its malignity should spread too far, I must just mention it to my younger readers, that Leland and others, in their replies to the modern Deists, have given very full, and as many learned men apprehend, very satisfactory answers to every one of the objections which you have derived from the Gnostic Heresy.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

"THE doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth," is the second of the causes to which you attribute the quick increase of Christianity. Now if we impartially consider the circumstances of the persons to whom the doctrine, not simply of a future life, but of a future life accompanied with punishments as well as rewards; not only of the immortality of the soul, but of the immortality of the soul accompanied with that of the resurrection, was delivered; I cannot be of opinion that, abstracted from the supernatural testimony by which it was enforced, it could have met with any very extensive reception amongst them.

It was not that kind of future life which they expected; it did not hold out to them the pu-

nishments of the infernal regions as *aniles fabulas.* To the question, *Quid si post mortem maneant animi?* they could not answer with Cicero and the philosophers—*Beatos esse concedo;* because there was a great probability that it might be quite otherwise with them. I am not to learn that there are passages to be picked up in the writings of the antients which might be produced as proofs of their expecting a future state of punishment for the flagitious; but this opinion was worn out of credit before the time of our Saviour: the whole disputation in the first book of the Tusculan Questions, goes upon the other supposition. Nor was the absurdity of the doctrine of future punishments confined to the writings of the philosophers, or the circles of the learned and polite; for Cicero, to mention no others, makes no secret of it in his public pleadings before the people at large. You yourself, Sir, have referred to his oration for Cluentius: in this oration, you may remember, he makes great mention of a very abandoned fellow, who had forged I know not how many wills, murdered I know not how many wives, and perpetrated a thousand other villanies; yet even to this profligate, by name Oppianicus, he is per-

suaded that death was not the occasion of any evil *. Hence, I think, we may conclude, that such of the Romans as were not wholly infected with the annihilating notions of Epicurus, but entertained (whether from remote tradition or enlightened argumentation) hopes of a future life, had no manner of expectation of such a life as included in it the severity of punishment denounced in the Christian scheme against the wicked.

Nor was it that kind of future life which they wished; they would have been glad enough of an Elysium which could have admitted into it men who had spent this life in the perpetration of every vice which can debase and pollute the human heart. To abandon every seducing gratification of sense, to pluck up every latent root of ambition, to subdue every impulse of revenge, to divest themselves of every inveterate habit in which their glory and their pleasure consisted;

* Nam nunc quidem quid tandem mali illi mors attulit? nisi fortè ineptiis ac fabulis ducimur, ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre, ac plures illic offendisse inimicos quam hic reliquisse—quæ si falsa sint, id quod omnes intelligunt, &c.

to do all this and more, before they could look up to the doctrine of a future life without terror and amazement, was not, one would think, an easy undertaking: nor was it likely that many would forsake the religious institutions of their ancestors, set at nought the gods under whose auspices the Capitol had been founded, and Rome made mistress of the world; and suffer themselves to be persuaded into the belief of a tenet, the very mention of which made Felix tremble, by any thing less than a full conviction of the supernatural authority of those who taught it.

The several schools of Gentile philosophy had discussed, with no small subtlety, every argument which reason could suggest, for and against the immortality of the soul; and those uncertain glimmerings of the light of nature would have prepared the minds of the learned for the reception of the full illustration of this subject by the gospel, had not the resurrection been a part of the doctrine therein advanced. But that this corporeal frame, which is hourly mouldering away, and resolved at last into the undistinguished mass of elements from which it was at first de-

rived, should ever be *clothed with immortality; that this corruptible should* ever *put on incorruption;* is a truth so far removed from the apprehension of philosophical research, so dissonant from the common conceptions of mankind, that amongst all ranks and persuasions of men it was esteemed an impossible thing. At Athens the philosophers had listened with patience to St. Paul, whilst they conceived him but a *setter forth of strange gods;* but as soon as they comprehended that by the *αναςασις* he meant the resurrection, they turned from him with contempt. It was principally the insisting upon the same topic, which made Festus think *that much learning had made him mad.* And the questions, *How are the dead raised up?* and, *With what body do they come?* seem, by Paul's solicitude to answer them with fulness and precision, to have been not unfrequently proposed to him by those who were desirous of becoming Christians.

The doctrine of a future life then, as promulged in the gospel, being neither agreeable to the expectations, nor corresponding with the wishes, nor conformable to the reason, of the Gentiles, I can discover no motive (setting aside

the true one, the divine power of its first preachers) which could induce them to receive it; and, in consequence of their belief, to conform their loose morals to the rigid standard of gospel purity, upon the mere authority of a few contemptible fishermen of Judea. And even you yourself, Sir, seem to have changed your opinion concerning the efficacy of the expectation of a future life in converting the Heathens, when you observe, in the following chapter, that "the Pagan multitude reserving their gratitude for temporal benefits alone, rejected the inestimable present of life and immortality which was offered to mankind by Jesus of Nazareth."

Montesquieu is of opinion that it will ever be impossible for Christianity to establish itself in China and the East, from this circumstance, that it prohibits a plurality of wives. How then could it have been possible for it to have pervaded the voluptuous capital, and traversed the utmost limits of the empire of Rome, by the feeble efforts of human industry, or human knavery?

But the Gentiles, you are of opinion, were converted by their fears; and reckon the doc-

trines of Christ's speedy appearance, of the millennium, and of the general conflagration, amongst those additional circumstances which gave weight to that concerning a future state. Before I proceed to the examination of the efficiency of these several circumstances in alarming the apprehensions of the Gentiles, what if I should grant your position? still the main question recurs—From what source did they derive the fears which converted them? Not surely from the mere human labours of men, who were every where spoken against, made a spectacle of, and considered as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things—not surely from the human powers of him who professed himself *rude in speech, in bodily presence contemptible*, and a despiser of *the excellency of speech, and the enticing words of men's wisdom*. No, such wretched instruments were but ill fitted to inspire the haughty and the learned Romans with any other passions than those of pity or contempt.

Now, Sir, if you please, we will consider that universal expectation of the approaching end of the world, which, you think, had such great influence in converting the Pagans to the profession

of Christianity. The near approach, you say, of this wonderful event had been predicted by the Apostles, "though the revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation." That this opinion, even in the times of the Apostles, had made its way into the Christian church, I readily admit; but that the Apostles ever either predicted this event to others, or cherished the expectation of it in themselves, does not seem probable to me. As this is a point of some difficulty and importance, you will suffer me to explain it at some length.

It must be owned that there are several passages in the writings of the Apostles, which, at first view, seem to countenance the opinion you have adopted. *Now*, says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, *it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.* And in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians he comforts such of them as were sorrowing for the loss of their friends, by assuring them that they were not lost for ever; but that the Lord, when he came, would bring them with

him; and that they would not, in the participation of any blessings, be in any wise behind those who should happen then to be alive: *we*, says he (the Christians of whatever age or country, agreeable to a frequent use of the pronoun *we*), *which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord.* In his Epistle to the Philippians he exhorts his Christian brethren not to disquiet themselves with carking cares about their temporal concerns, from this powerful consideration, that the Lord was at hand: *Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand; be careful about nothing.* The Apostle to the Hebrews inculcates the same doctrine, admonishing his converts *to provoke one another to love, and to good works; and so much the more, as they saw the day approaching.* The age in which the Apostles lived, is frequently called by them the end of the world, the last days, the last hour. I think it unnecessary, Sir,

to trouble you with an explication of these and other similar texts of Scripture, which are usually adduced in support of your opinion; since I hope to be able to give you a direct proof, that the Apostles neither comforted themselves, nor encouraged others, with the delightful hope of seeing their Master coming again into the world. It is evident then that St. John, who survived all the other Apostles, could not have had any such expectation; since in the Book of the Revelation, the future events of the Christian church, which were not to take place, many of them, till a long series of years after his death, and some of which have not yet been accomplished, are there minutely described. St. Peter, in like manner, strongly intimates, that the day of the Lord might be said to be at hand, though it was at the distance of a thousand years or more; for in replying to the taunt of those who did then, or should in future ask, *Where is the promise of his coming?* he says, *Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.* And he speaks of putting off his tabernacle, as the Lord had shewed

him; and of his endeavour, that the Christians after his decease might be able to have these things in remembrance: so that it is past a doubt, he could not be of opinion that the Lord would come in his time. As to St. Paul, upon a partial view of whose writings the doctrine concerning the speedy coming of Christ is principally founded; it is manifest that he was conscious he should not live to see it, notwithstanding the expression before mentioned, *we which are alive;* for he foretels his own death in express terms—*the time of my departure is at hand;* and he speaks of his reward, not as immediately to be conferred on him; but as laid up and reserved for him till some future day—*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.* There is moreover one passage in his writings, which is so express and full to the purpose, that it will put the matter I think beyond all doubt; it occurs in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: they, it seems, had either by misinterpreting some parts of his former letter to them, or by the preaching of some, who had not the spirit of truth; by

some means or other, they had been led to expect the speedy coming of Christ, and been greatly disturbed in mind upon that account. To remove this error, he writes to them in the following very solemn and affectionate manner: *We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand; let no man deceive you by any means.* He then goes on to describe a falling away, a great corruption of the Christian church, which was to happen before the day of the Lord. Now by this revelation of the man of sin, this mystery of iniquity, which is to be consumed with the spirit of his mouth, destroyed by the brightness of his coming, we have every reason to believe, is to be understood the past and present abominations of the church of Rome. How then can it be said of Paul, who clearly foresaw this corruption above seventeen hundred years ago, that he expected the coming of the Lord in his own day? Let us press, Sir, the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation as closely as you please; but let us press it truly; and we may, perhaps,

find reason from thence to receive, with less reluctance, a religion, which describes a corruption, the strangeness of which, had it not been foretold in unequivocal terms, might have amazed even a friend to Christianity.

I will produce you, Sir, a prophecy, which the more closely you press it, the more reason you will have to believe, that the speedy coming of Christ could never have been *predicted* by the Apostles. Take it, as translated by Bishop Newton: *But the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall apostatize from the faith; giving heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons, through the hypocrisy of liars; having their conscience seared with a red hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.*—Here you have an express prophecy—the Spirit hath spoken it—that in the latter times—not immediately, but at some distant period—some should apostatize from the faith—some who had been Christians, should in truth be so no longer—but should give heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons:—Press this expression closely, and you may, perhaps, discover in it the erro-

neous tenets, and the demon of saint worship, of the church of Rome;—through the hypocrisy of liars:—You recognize, no doubt, the priesthood, and the martyrologists;——having their conscience seared with a red-hot iron;—Callous indeed, must his conscience be, who traffics in indulgences;—forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats:—This language needs no pressing; it discovers, at once, the unhappy votaries of monastic life, and the mortal sin of eating flesh on fast days.

If, notwithstanding what has been said, you should still be of opinion, that the Apostles expected Christ would come in their time; it will not follow, that this their error ought in any wise to diminish their authority as preachers of the gospel. I am sensible this position may alarm even some well-wishers to Christianity; and supply its enemies with what they will think an irrefragable argument. The Apostles, they will say, were inspired with the spirit of truth; and yet they fell into a gross mistake, concerning a matter of great importance: how is this to be reconciled? Perhaps, in the following manner: When the time of our Saviour's ministry was

nearly at an end, he thought proper to raise the spirits of his disciples, who were quite cast down with what he had told them about his design of leaving them; by promising, that he would send to them the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth; who should teach them all things, and lead them into all truth. And we know, that this his promise was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and we know farther, that from that time forward, they were enabled to speak with tongues, to work miracles, to preach the word with power, and to comprehend the mystery of the new dispensation which was committed unto them. But we have no reason from hence to conclude, that they were immediately inspired with the apprehension of whatever might be known; that they became acquainted with all kinds of truth: they were undoubtedly led into such truths as it was necessary for them to know, in order to their converting the world to Christianity; but in other things, they were probably left to the exercise of their understandings, as other men usually are. But surely they might be proper witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ, though they were not acquainted with

every thing which might have been known; though, in particular, they were ignorant of the precise time when our Lord would come to judge the world. It can be no impeachment, either of their integrity as men, or their ability as historians, or their honesty as preachers of the gospel, that they were unacquainted with what had never been revealed to them; that they followed their own understandings where they had no better light to guide them; speaking from conjecture, when they could not speak from certainty; of themselves, when they had no commandment of the Lord. They knew but in part, and they prophesied but in part; and concerning this particular point, Jesus himself had told them, just as he was about finally to leave them, that it was not for them to *know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power*. Nor is it to be wondered at, that the Apostles were left in a state of uncertainty concerning the time in which Christ should appear; since beings far more exalted, and more highly favoured of heaven, than they, were under an equal degree of ignorance: *Of that day*, says our Saviour, *and of that hour, knoweth no one; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the*

Son, but the Father only.—I am afraid, Sir, I have tired you with Scripture quotations; but if I have been fortunate enough to convince you, either that the speedy coming of Christ was never expected, much less *predicted*, by the Apostles; or that their mistake in that particular expectation, can in no degree diminish the general weight of their testimony as historians, I shall not be sorry for the *ennui* I may have occasioned you.

The doctrine of the Millennium is the second of the circumstances which you produce, as giving weight to that of a future state; and you represent this doctrine as having been "carefully inculcated by a succession of the fathers, from Justin Martyr and Irenæus down to Lactantius;" and observed that, when "the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside:" and in the notes you refer us, as a proof of what you advance, to "Irenæus, the disciple of Papias, who had seen the Apostle St. John," and to the second Dialogue of Justin with Trypho.

I wish, Sir, you had turned to Eusebius, for

the character of this Papias, who had seen the Apostle St. John; you would there have found him represented as little better than a credulous old woman; very averse from reading, but mightily given to pick up stories and traditions next to fabulous; amongst which Eusebius reckons this of the Millennium one. Nor is it, I apprehend, quite certain, that Papias ever saw, much less discoursed, as seems to be insinuated, with the Apostle St. John. Eusebius thinks rather, that it was John the Presbyter he had seen. But what if he had seen the Apostle himself? Many a weak-headed man had undoubtedly seen him as well as Papias; and it would be hard indeed upon Christians, if they were compelled to receive as apostolical traditions the wild reveries of ancient enthusiasm, or such crude conceptions of ignorant fanaticism, as nothing but the rust of antiquity can render venerable.

As to the works of Justin, the very dialogue you refer to contains a proof, that the doctrine of the Millennium had not, even in his time, the universal reception you have supposed; but that many Christians of pure and pious principles

rejected it. I wonder how this passage escaped you; but it may be that you followed Tillotson, who himself followed Mede, and read in the original ε instead of αυ; and thus unwarily violated the idiom of the language, the sense of the context, and the authority of the best editions*. In the note you observe, that it is unnecessary for you to mention all the intermediate fathers between Justin and Lactantius, as the fact, you say, is not disputed. In a man who has read so many books, and to so good a purpose, he must be captious indeed, who cannot excuse small mistakes. That unprejudiced regard to truth

* Justin, in answering the question proposed by Trypho, Whether the Christians believed the doctrine of the Millennium, says, Ωμολογησα ειν σοι και προοτερον, οτι εγω μεν και αλλοι πολλοι ταυτα φρονουμεν, ως και παντως επιστασθε, τουτο γενησομενον. Πολλους δ'αυ και των της ΚΑΘΑΡΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΣΕΒΟΥΣ οντων Χριστιανων ΓΝΩΜΗΣ τουτο μη γνωριζειν, εσημανα σοι. The note subjoined to this passage out of Justin, in Thirlby's Ed. an. 1722. is, [Πολλους δ'αυ και των της καθαρας] Medus (quem sequitur Tillotsonus, Reg. Fidei per iii. sect. 9, p. 756, & seq. legit των ε της καθαρας. Vehementer errant viri præclari.

And in Jebb's Edit. an. 1719, we have the following note: Doctrina itaque de Millennio, neque erat universalis ecclesiæ traditio, nec opinio de fide recepta, &c.

however, which is the great characteristic of every distinguished historian, will, I am persuaded, make you thank me for recalling to your memory, that Origen, the most learned of all the fathers, and Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, usually for his immense erudition surnamed the Great, were both of them prior to Lactantius, and both of them impugners of the Millennium doctrine. Look, Sir, into Mosheim, or almost any writer of ecclesiastical history; and you will find the opposition of Origen and Dionysius to this system particularly noticed: look into so common an author as Whitby, and in his learned treatise upon this subject, you will find he has well proved these two propositions: first, that this opinion of the Millennium was never generally received in the church of Christ; secondly, that there is no just ground to think it was derived from the Apostles. From hence, I think, we may conclude, that this Millennium doctrine (which, by the bye, though it be new modelled, is not yet thrown aside) could not have been any very serviceable scaffold in the erection of that mighty edifice, which has crushed by the weight of its materials, and debased by the elegance of

its structure, the stateliest temples of heathen superstition. With these remarks, I take leave of the Millennium; just observing, that your third circumstance, the general conflagration, seems to be effectually included in your first, the speedy coming of Christ.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

SIR,

You esteem "the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church," as the third of the secondary causes of the rapid growth of Christianity. I should be willing to account the miracles, not merely ascribed to the primitive church, but really performed by the Apostles, as the one great primary cause of the conversion of the Gentiles. But waving this consideration, let us see whether the miraculous powers, which you ascribe to the primitive church, were in any eminent degree calculated to spread the belief of Christianity amongst a great and an enlightened people.

They consisted, you tell us, "of divine inspirations, conveyed sometimes in the form of a sleeping, sometimes of a waking vision; and were liberally bestowed on all ranks of the faith-

ful, on women as on elders, on boys as well as upon bishops." "The design of these visions," you say, "was for the most part either to disclose the future history, or to guide the present administration of the church." You speak of "the expulsion of demons as an ordinary triumph of religion, usually performed in a public manner; and when the patient was relieved by the skill or the power of the exorcist, the vanquished demon was heard to confess, that he was one of the fabled gods of antiquity who had impiously usurped the adoration of mankind;" and you represent even the miracle of the resurrection of the dead, as frequently performed on necessary occasions.—Cast your eye, Sir, upon the church of Rome, and ask yourself (I put the question to your heart, and beg you will consult that for an answer; ask yourself) whether her absurd pretensions to that very kind of miraculous powers, you have here displayed as operating to the increase of Christianity, have not converted half her numbers to Protestantism, and the other half to Infidelity? Neither the sword of the civil magistrate, nor the possession of the keys of heaven, nor the terrors of her spiritual thunder, have been able to keep within her pale, even those who

have been bred up in her faith; how then should you think, that the very cause which hath almost extinguished Christianity among Christians, should have established it among Pagans? I beg I may not be misunderstood; I do not take upon me to say, that all the miracles recorded in the history of the primitive church after the apostolical age, were forgeries; it is foreign to the present purpose to deliver any opinion upon that subject; but I do beg leave to insist upon this, that such of them as were forgeries, must in that learned age, by their easy detection, have rather impeded than accelerated the progress of Christianity; and it appears very probable to me, that nothing but the recent prevailing evidence of real, unquestioned, apostolical miracles, could have secured the infant church from being destroyed by those which were falsely ascribed to it.

It is not every man who can nicely separate the corruptions of religion from religion itself; nor justly apportion the degrees of credit due to the diversities of evidence; and those who have ability for the task, are usually ready enough to emancipate themselves from gospel restraints

(which thwart the propensities of sense, check the ebullitions of passion, and combat the prejudices of the world at every turn) by blending its native simplicity with the superstitions which have been derived from it. No argument so well suited to the indolence or the immorality of mankind, as that priests of all ages and religions are the same; we see the pretensions of the Romish priesthood to miraculous powers, and we know them to be false; we are conscious, that they at least must sacrifice their integrity to their interest, or their ambition; and being persuaded, that there is a great sameness in the passions of mankind, and in their incentives to action; and knowing, that the history of past ages is abundantly stored with similar claims to supernatural authority, we traverse back in imagination the most distant regions of antiquity; and finding, from a superficial view, nothing to discriminate one set of men, or one period of time from another; we hastily conclude, that all revealed religion is a cheat, and that the miracles attributed to the Apostles themselves are supported by no better testimony, nor more worthy our attention, than the prodigies of Pagan story, or the lying wonders of Papal artifice. I have

no intention, in this place, to enlarge upon the many circumstances, by which a candid inquirer after truth might be able to distinguish a pointed difference between the miracles of Christ and his Apostles, and the tricks of ancient or modern superstition. One observation I would just suggest to you upon the subject; the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament are so intimately united with the narration of common events, and the ordinary transactions of life, that you cannot, as in profane history, separate the one from the other. My meaning will be illustrated by an instance: Tacitus and Suetonius have handed down to us an account of many great actions performed by Vespasian; amongst the rest, they inform us of his having wrought some miracles, of his having cured a lame man, and restored sight to one that was blind. But what they tell us of these miracles, is so unconnected with every thing that goes before and after, that you may reject the relation of them without injuring, in any degree, the consistency of the narration of the other circumstances of his life: on the other hand, if you reject the relation of the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus Christ, you must

necessarily reject the account of his whole life, and of several transactions, concerning which we have the undoubted testimony of other writers besides the Evangelists. But if this argument should not strike you, perhaps the following observation may tend to remove a little of the prejudice usually conceived against gospel miracles, by men of lively imaginations, from the gross forgeries attributed to the first ages of the church.

The phænomena of physics are sometimes happily illustrated by an hypothesis; and the most recondite truths of mathematical science not unfrequently investigated from an absurd position: what if we try the same method of arguing in the case before us? Let us suppose then, that a new revelation was to be promulged to mankind; and that twelve unlearned and unfriended men, inhabitants of any country most odious and despicable in the eyes of Europe, should by the power of God be endowed with the faculty of speaking languages they had never learned, and performing works surpassing all human ability; and that being strongly impressed with a particular truth, which they were commissioned to

promulgate, they should travel not only through the barbarous regions of Africa, but through all the learned and polished states of Europe; preaching every where with unremitted sedulity a new religion, working stupendous miracles in attestation of their mission, and communicating to their first converts (as a seal of their conversion) a variety of spiritual gifts; does it appear probable to you, that after the death of these men, and probably after the death of most of their immediate successors, who had been zealously attached to the faith they had seen so miraculously confirmed, that none would ever attempt to impose upon the credulous or the ignorant, by a fictitious claim to supernatural powers? would none of them aspire to the gift of tongues? would none of them mistake phrenzy for illumination, and the delusions of a heated brain for the impulses of the spirit? would none undertake to cure inveterate disorders, to expel demons, or to raise the dead? As far as I can apprehend, we ought, from such a position, to deduce, by every rule of probable reasoning, the precise conclusion, which was in fact verified in the case of the Apostles; every

species of miracles, which Heaven had enabled the first preachers to perform, would be counterfeited, either from misguided zeal or interested cunning, either through the imbecility or the iniquity of mankind; and we might just as reasonably conclude, that there never was any piety, charity, or chastity in the world, from seeing such plenty of pretenders to these virtues, as that there never were any real miracles performed, from considering the great store of those which have been forged.

But, I know not how it has happened, there are many in the present age (I am far from including you, Sir, in the number) whose prejudices against all miraculous events have arisen to that height, that it appears to them utterly impossible for any human testimony, however great, to establish their credibility. I beg pardon for styling their reasoning, prejudice; I have no design to give offence by that word; they may, with equal right, throw the same imputation upon mine; and I think it just as illiberal in divines, to attribute the scepticism of every Deist to wilful infidelity; as it is in the Deists to refer the faith of every divine to professional bias. I

have not had so little intercourse with mankind, nor shunned so much the delightful freedom of social converse, as to be ignorant, that there are many men of upright morals and good understandings, to whom, as you express it, "a latent and even involuntary scepticism adheres;" and who would be glad to be persuaded to be Christians: and how severe soever some men may be in their judgments concerning one another; yet we Christians, at least, hope and believe, that the great Judge of all will make allowance for "our habits of study and reflection," for various circumstances, the efficacy of which, in giving a particular bent to the understandings of men, we can neither comprehend, nor estimate. For the sake of such men, if such should ever be induced to throw an hour away in the perusal of these letters, suffer me to step for a moment out of my way, whilst I hazard an observation or two upon the subject.

Knowledge is rightly divided by Mr. Locke into intuitive, sensitive, and demonstrative. It is clear, that a past miracle can neither be the object of sense nor of intuition, nor consequently of demonstration; we cannot then, philosophi-

cally speaking, be said to know, that a miracle has ever been performed. But, in all the great concerns of life, we are influenced by probability rather than knowledge; and of probability, the same great author establishes two foundations; a conformity to our own experience, and the testimony of others. Now it is contended, that by the opposition of these two principles, probability is destroyed; or, in other terms, that human testimony can never influence the mind to assent to a proposition repugnant to uniform experience.—Whose experience do you mean? You will not say, your own; for the experience of an individual reaches but a little way; and no doubt, you daily assent to a thousand truths in politics, in physics, and in the business of common life, which you have never seen verified by experience.—You will not produce the experience of your friends; for that can extend itself but a little way beyond your own.—But by uniform experience, I conceive, you are desirous of understanding the experience of all ages and nations since the foundation of the world. I answer, first; how is it that you become acquainted with the experience of all ages and nations? You will reply, from history.—Be it

so:—Peruse then by far the most ancient records of antiquity: and if you find no mention of miracles in them, I give up the point. Yes;—but every thing related therein respecting miracles, is to be reckoned fabulous.—Why?—Because miracles contradict the experience of all ages and nations. Do you not perceive, Sir, that you beg the very question in debate? for we affirm, that the great and learned nation of Egypt, that the Heathen inhabiting the land of Canaan, that the numerous people of the Jews, and the nations which, for ages, surrounded them, have all had great experience of miracles. You cannot otherways obviate this conclusion, than by questioning the authenticity of that book, concerning which, Newton, when he was writing his Commentary on Daniel, expressed himself to the person* from whom I had the anecdote, and which deserves not to be lost: "I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible, than in any profane history whatsoever."

However, I mean not to press you with the argument *ad verecundiam;* it is needless to so-

* Dr. Smith, late Master of Trinity College.

licit your modesty, when it may be possible, perhaps, to make an impression upon your judgment: I answer, therefore, in the second place, that the admission of the principle by which you reject miracles, will lead us into absurdity. The laws of gravitation are the most obvious of all the laws of nature; every person in every part of the globe, must of necessity have had experience of them. There was a time when no one was acquainted with the laws of magnetism; these suspend in many instances the laws of gravity; nor can I see, upon the principle in question, how the rest of mankind could have credited the testimony of their first discoverer; and yet to have rejected it, would have been to reject the truth. But that a piece of iron should ascend gradually from the earth, and fly at last with an increasing rapidity through the air; and attaching itself to another piece of iron, or to a particular species of iron ore, should remain suspended in opposition to the action of its gravity, is consonant to the laws of nature.—I grant it; but there was a time when it was contrary, I say not to the laws of nature, but to the uniform experience of all preceding ages and countries; and at that particular point of time, the testimony

of an individual, or of a dozen individuals, who should have reported themselves eye witnesses of such a fact, ought, according to your argumentation, to have been received as fabulous. And what are those laws of nature, which, you think, can never be suspended? are they not different to different men, according to the diversities of their comprehension and knowledge? and if any one of them (that, for instance, which rules the operations of magnetism or electricity) should have been known to you or to me alone, whilst all the rest of the world were unacquainted with it; the effects of it would have been new, and unheard of in the annals, and contrary to the experience, of mankind; and therefore ought not, in your opinion, to have been believed. Nor do I understand what difference, as to credibility, there could be between the effects of such an unknown law of nature and a miracle: for it is a matter of no moment, in that view, whether the suspension of the known laws of nature be effected, that is, whether a miracle be performed, by the mediation of other laws that are unknown, or by the ministry of a person divinely commissioned; since it is impossible for us to be certain, that it is contradictory to the constitution of the

universe, that the laws of nature, which appear to us general, should not be suspended, and their action over-ruled by others, still more general, though less known; that is, that miracles should not be performed before such a being as man, at those times, in those places, and under those circumstances, which God, in his universal providence, had pre-ordained.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

SIR,

I READILY acknowledge the utility of your fourth cause, "the virtues of the first Christians," as greatly conducing to the spreading their religion; but then you seem to quite mar the compliment you pay them, by representing their virtues as proceeding either from their repentance for having been the most abandoned sinners, or from the laudable desire of supporting the reputation of the society in which they were engaged.

That repentance is the first step to virtue, is true enough; but I see no reason for supposing, according to the calumnies of Celsus and Julian, "that the Christians allured into their party, men who washed away in the waters of baptism the guilt for which the temples of the gods refused to grant them any expiation." The Apostles,

Sir, did not, like Romulus, open an asylum for debtors, thieves, and murderers; for they had not the same sturdy means of securing their adherents from the grasp of civil power: they did not persuade them to abandon the temples of the gods, because they could there obtain no expiation for their guilt, but because every degree of guilt was expiated in them with too great facility; and every vice practised, not only without remorse of private conscience, but with the powerful sanction of public approbation.

"After the example," you say, "of their Divine Master, the missionaries of the gospel addressed themselves to men, and especially to women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often by the effects, of their vices."—This, Sir, I really think, is not a fair representation of the matter; it may catch the applause of the unlearned, embolden many a stripling to cast off for ever the sweet blush of modesty, confirm many a dissolute veteran in the practice of his impure habits, and suggest great occasion of merriment and wanton mockery to the flagitious of every denomination and every age; but still it will want that foundation of truth, which alone

can recommend it to the serious and judicious. The Apostles, Sir, were not like the Italian *Fraticelli* of the thirteenth, nor the French *Turlupins* of the fourteenth century; in all the dirt that has been raked up against Christianity, even by the worst of its enemies, not a speck of that kind have they been able to fix, either upon the Apostles, or their Divine Master. The gospel of Jesus Christ, Sir, was not preached in single houses or obscure villages, not in subterraneous caves and impure brothels, not in lazars and in prisons; but in the synagogues and in the temples, in the streets and in the market-places of the great capitals of the Roman provinces; in Jerusalem, in Corinth, and in Antioch, in Athens, in Ephesus, and in Rome. Nor do I any where find that its missionaries were ordered particularly to address themselves to the shameless women you mention; I do indeed find the direct contrary; for they were ordered to turn away from, to have no fellowship or intercourse with such as were wont *to creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.* And what if a few women, who had either been seduced by their passions, or had fallen victims to the licentious manners of

their age, should be found amongst those who were most ready to receive a religion that forbade all impurity? I do not apprehend that this circumstance ought to bring an insinuation of discredit, either upon the sex, or upon those who wrought their reformation.

That the majority of the first converts to Christianity, were of an inferior condition in life, may readily be allowed; and you yourself have in another place given a good reason for it; those who are distinguished by riches, honours, or knowledge, being so very inconsiderable in number, when compared with the bulk of mankind: but though not many mighty, not many noble, were called; yet some mighty, and some noble, some of as great reputation as any of the age in which they lived, were attached to the Christian faith. Short indeed are the accounts, which have been transmitted to us, of the first propagating of Christianity; yet even in these we meet with the names of many, who would have done credit to any cause: I will not pretend to enumerate them all; a few of them will be sufficient to make you recollect, that there were, at least, some converts to Christianity, both from

among the Jews and the Gentiles, whose lives were not stained with inexpiable crimes. Amongst these we reckon Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; Joseph of Arimathea, a man of fortune and a counsellor; a nobleman and a centurion of Capernaum; Jairus, Crispus, Sosthenes, rulers of synagogues; Apollos, an eloquent and learned man; Zenas, a Jewish lawyer, the treasurer of Candace queen of Ethiopia; Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band; Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus at Athens; and Sergius Paulus, a man of proconsular or prætorian authority, of whom it may be remarked, that if he resigned his high and lucrative office in consequence of his turning Christian, it is a strong presumption in its favour; if he retained it, we may conclude, that the profession of Christianity was not so utterly incompatible with the discharge of the offices of civil life, as you sometimes represent it. This catalogue of men of rank, fortune, and knowledge, who embraced Christianity, might, was it necessary, be much enlarged; and probably another conversation with St. Paul would have enabled us to grace it with the names of Festus, and king Agrippa himself; not that the writers of the Books of the

New Testament seem to have been at all solicitous in mentioning the great or the learned who were converted to the faith; had that been part of their design, they would, in the true style of impostors, have kept out of sight the publicans and sinners, the tanners and the tentmakers with whom they conversed and dwelt; and introduced to our notice none but those who had been *brought up with Herod, or the chief men of Asia* —whom they had the honour to number amongst their friends.

That the primitive Christians took great care to have an unsullied reputation, by abstaining from the commission of whatever might tend to pollute it, is easily admitted; but we do not so easily grant, that this care is a "circumstance which usually attends small assemblies of men, when they separate themselves from the body of a nation, or the religion to which they belonged." It did not attend the Nicolaitanes, the Simonians, the Menandrians, and the Carpocratians in the first ages of the church, of which you are speaking; and it cannot be unknown to you, Sir, that the scandalous vices of these very early sectaries, brought a general and undistin-

guished censure upon the Christian name; and so far from promoting the increase of the church, excited in the minds of the Pagans an abhorrence of whatever respected it: it cannot be unknown to you, Sir, that several sectaries both at home and abroad might be mentioned, who have departed from the religion to which they belonged; and which, unhappily for themselves and the community, have taken as little care to preserve their reputation unspotted as those of the first and second centuries. If then the first Christians did take the care you mention, (and I am wholly of your opinion in that point,) their solicitude might as candidly, perhaps, and as reasonably be derived from a sense of their duty, and an honest endeavour to discharge it, as from the mere desire of increasing the honour of their confraternity by the illustrious integrity of its members.

You are eloquent in describing the austere morality of the primitive Christians, as adverse to the propensities of sense, and abhorrent from all the innocent pleasures and amusements of life; and you enlarge, with a studied minuteness, upon their censures of luxury, and their senti-

ments concerning marriage and chastity:—but in this circumstantial enumeration of their errors or their faults, (which I am under no necessity of denying or excusing,) you seem to forget the very purpose for which you profess to have introduced the mention of them; for the picture you have drawn is so hideous, and the colouring so dismal, that instead of alluring to a closer inspection, it must have made every man of pleasure or of sense turn from it with horror or disgust, and so far from contributing to the rapid growth of Christianity by the austerity of their manners, it must be a wonder to any one, how the first Christians ever made a single convert.—It was first objected by Celsus, that Christianity was a mean religion, inculcating such a pusillanimity and patience under affronts, such a contempt of riches and worldly honours as must weaken the nerves of civil government, and expose a society of Christians to the prey of the first invaders. This objection has been repeated by Bayle; and though fully answered by Bernard and others, it is still the favourite theme of every *esprit fort* of our own age: even you, Sir, think the aversion of Christians to the business of war and government, "a criminal disregard to the

public welfare." To all that has been said upon this subject, it may with justice, I think, be answered, that Christianity troubles not itself with ordering the constitutions of civil societies, but levels the weight of all its influence at the hearts of the individuals which compose them; and, as Origen said to Celsus, was every individual in every nation a gospel Christian, there would be neither internal injustice nor external war; there would be none of those passions which embitter the intercourses of civil life, and desolate the globe. What reproach then can it be to a religion, that it inculcates doctrines which, if universally practised, would introduce universal tranquillity, and the most exalted happiness amongst mankind?

It must proceed from a total misapprehension of the design of the Christian dispensation, or from a very ignorant interpretation of the particular injunctions, forbidding us to make riches or honours a primary pursuit, or the prompt gratification of revenge a first principle of action, to infer—that an individual Christian is obliged by his religion to offer his throat to an assassin, and his property to the first plunderer; or that a

society of Christians may not repel, in the best manner they are able, the unjust assaults of hostile invasion.

I know of no precepts in the gospel which debar a man from the possession of domestic comforts, or deaden the activity of his private friendships, or prohibit the exertion of his utmost ability in the service of the public; the *nisi quietum nihil beatum* is no part of the Christian's creed: his virtue is an active virtue; and we justly refer to the school of Epicurus the doctrines concerning abstinence from marriage, from the cultivation of friendship, from the management of public affairs, as suited to that selfish indolence, which was the favourite tenet of his philosophy.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

SIR,

"THE union and the discipline of the Christian church," or, as you are pleased to style it, of the Christian republic, is the last of the five secondary causes, to which you have referred the rapid and extensive spread of Christianity. It must be acknowledged, that union essentially contributes to the strength of every association, civil, military, and religious; but unfortunately for your argument, and much to the reproach of Christians, nothing has been more wanting amongst them, from the apostolic age to our own, than union. *I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ,* are expressions of disunion which we meet with in the earliest period of church history: and we cannot look into the writings of any, either friend

or foe to Christianity, but we find the one of them lamenting, and the other exulting in an immense catalogue of sectaries; and both of them thereby furnishing us with great reason to believe, that the divisions with respect to doctrine, worship, and discipline, which have ever subsisted in the church, must have greatly tended to hurt the credit of Christianity, and to alienate the minds of the Gentiles from the reception of such a various and discordant faith.

I readily grant, that there was a certain community of doctrine, an intercourse of hospitality, and a confederacy of discipline established amongst the individuals of every church; so that none could be admitted into any assembly of Christians, without undergoing a previous examination into his manner of life*, (which shews, by the bye, that every reprobate could not, as the fit seized him, or his interest induced him, become a Christian,) and without protesting in the most solemn manner, that he would neither

* Nonnulli præpositi sunt, qui in vitam et mores eorum, qui admittuntur, inquirant, ut non concessa facientes candidatos religionis arceant a suis conventibus.—Orig. con. Cels. Lib. 2.

be guilty of murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor perfidy; and it may be granted also, that those who broke this compact, were ejected by common consent from the confraternity into which they had been admitted: it may be further granted, that this confederacy extended itself to independent churches; and that those who had, for their immoralities, been excluded from Christian community in any one church, were rarely, if ever, admitted to it by another; just as a member, who had been expelled any one College in an University, is generally thought unworthy of being admitted by any other: but it is not admitted, that this severity and this union of discipline could ever have induced the Pagans to forsake the gods of their country, and to expose themselves to the contemptuous hatred of their neighbours, and to all the severities of persecution, exercised, with unrelenting barbarity, against the Christians.

The account you give of the origin and progress of episcopal jurisdiction, of the pre-eminence of the Metropolitan churches, and of the ambition of the Roman Pontiff, I believe to be in general accurate and true; and I am not in

the least surprised at the bitterness which now and then escapes you in treating this subject: for, to see the most benign religion that imagination can form, becoming an instrument of oppression; and the most humble one administering to the pride, the avarice, and the ambition of those who wished to be considered as its guardians, and who avowed themselves its professors, would extort a censure from men more attached probably to church authority than yourself: not that I think it either a very candid, or a very useful undertaking, to be solely and industriously engaged in pourtraying the characters of the professors of Christianity in the worst colours; it is not candid, because "the great law of impartiality, which obliges an historian to reveal the imperfections of the uninspired teachers and believers of the gospel," obliges him also not to conceal, or to pass over with niggard and reluctant mention, the illustrious virtues of those, who gave up fortune and fame, all their comforts, and all their hopes in this life, nay, life itself, rather than violate any one of the precepts of that gospel, which, from the testimony of inspired teachers, they conceived they had good reason to believe; it is not useful, because "to a care-

less observer" (that is, to the generality of mankind) "*their* faults may seem to cast a shade on the faith which they professed;" and may really infect the minds of the young and unlearned especially, with prejudices against a religion, upon their rational reception or rejection of which, a matter of the utmost importance may (believe me, Sir, it may, for aught you or any person else can prove to the contrary) entirely depend. It is an easy matter to amuse ourselves and others with the immoralities of priests and the ambition of prelates, with the absurd virulence of synods and councils, with the ridiculous doctrines which visionary enthusiasts or interested churchmen have sanctified with the name of Christian: but a display of ingenuity or erudition upon such subjects is much misplaced; since it excites almost in every person, an unavoidable suspicion of the purity of the source itself, from which such polluted streams have been derived. Do not mistake my meaning; I am far from wishing, that the clergy should be looked up to with a blind reverence, or their imperfections screened by the sanctity of their functions, from the animadversion of the world; quite the contrary: their conduct, I am of opinion, ought to be more

nicely scrutinized, and their deviation from the rectitude of the gospel more severely censured, than that of other men; but great care should be taken, not to represent *their* vices, or *their* indiscretions, as originating in the principles of their religion. Do not mistake me: I am not here begging quarter for Christianity; or contending, that even the principles of our religion should be received with implicit faith; or that every objection to Christianity should be stifled, by a representation of the mischief it might do, if publicly promulged: on the contrary, we invite, nay, we challenge you to a direct and liberal attack; though oblique glances, and disingenuous insinuations, we are willing to avoid; well knowing, that the character of our religion, like that of an honest man, is defended with greater difficulty against the suggestions of ridicule, and the secret malignity of pretended friends, than against positive accusations, and the avowed malice of open enemies.

In your account of the primitive church, you set forth, that "the want of discipline and human learning was supplied by the occasional assistance of the prophets; who were called to

that function without distinction of age, of sex, or of natural abilities."—That the gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts by which some of the first Christians were enabled to co-operate with the Apostles, in the general design of preaching the Gospel; and that this gift, or rather, as Mr. Locke thinks, the gift of tongues (by the ostentation of which, many of them were prompted to speak in their assemblies at the same time) was the occasion of some disorder in the church of Corinth, which required the interposition of the Apostle to compose, is confessed on all hands. But if you mean, that the prophets were ever the sole pastors of the faithful; or that no provision was made by the Apostles for the good government and edification of the church, except what might be accidentally derived from the occasional assistance of the prophets, you are much mistaken; and have undoubtedly forgot what is said of Paul and Barnabas having ordained elders in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch; and of Paul's commission to Titus, whom he had left in Crete, to ordain elders in every city; and of his instructions both to him and Timothy, concerning the qualifications of those whom they were to appoint bishops; one of which was, that

a bishop should be able, by sound doctrine, to exhort and to convince the gainsayer; nor is it said, that this sound doctrine was to be communicated to the bishop by prophecy, or that all persons, without distinction, might be called to that office; but a bishop was *to be able to teach*, not what he had learned by prophecy, but what Paul had publicly preached; *the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.* And in every place almost, where prophets are mentioned, they are joined with apostles and teachers, and other ministers of the gospel; so that there is no reason for your representing them as a distinct order of men, who were by their occasional assistance to supply the want of discipline and human learning in the church. It would be taking too large a field, to inquire, whether the prophets you speak of were endowed with ordinary or extraordinary gifts; whether they always spoke by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, or according to *the analogy of faith*; whether their gift consisted in the foretelling of future events, or in the interpreting of scripture to the edification and exhortation and comfort of the church, or in both: I will content

myself with observing, that he will judge very improperly concerning the prophets of the apostolic church, who takes his idea of their office or importance from your description of them.

In speaking of the community of the goods, which, you say, was adopted for a short time in the primitive church, you hold as inconclusive the arguments of Mosheim; who has endeavoured to prove, that it was a community quite different from that recommended by Pythagoras or Plato; consisting principally in a common use, derived from an unbounded liberality, which induced the opulent to share their riches with their indigent brethren: there have been others, as well as Mosheim, who have entertained this opinion; and it is not quite so indefensible as you represent it: but whether it be reasonable or absurd, need not now be examined; it is far more necessary to take notice of an expression which you have used, and which may be apt to mislead unwary readers into a very injurious suspicion, concerning the integrity of the Apostles. In process of time, you observe, "the converts who embraced the new religion, were permitted to retain the possession of their patrimony."—This

expression, *permitted to retain*, in ordinary acceptation, implies an antecedent obligation to part with: now, Sir, I have not the shadow of a doubt in affirming, that we have no account in scripture of any such obligation being imposed upon the converts to Christianity, either by Christ himself, or by his Apostles, or by any other authority; nay, in the very place where this community of goods is treated of, there is an express proof (I know not how your impartiality has happened to overlook it) to the contrary. When Peter was about to inflict an exemplary punishment upon Ananias (not for keeping back a part of the price, as some men are fond of representing it, but) for his lying and hypocrisy, in offering a part of the price of his land, as the whole of it; he said to him, *Whilst it remained* (unsold), *was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?* From this account it is evident, that Ananias was under no obligation to part with his patrimony; and, after he had parted with it, the price was in his own power: the Apostle would have *permitted him to retain* the whole of it, if he had thought fit; though he would not permit his prevarication to go unpunished.

You have remarked, that "the feasts of love, the agapæ, as they were called, constituted a very pleasing and essential part of public worship."—Lest any one should from hence be led to suspect, that these feasts of love, this pleasing part of the public worship of the primitive church, resembled the unhallowed meetings of some impure sectaries of our own times, I will take the liberty to add to your account, a short explication of the nature of these agapæ. Tertullian, in the 39th chapter of his Apology, has done it to my hands. "The nature of our supper," says he, "is indicated by its name; it is called by a word which, in the Greek language, signifies love. We are not anxious about the expense of the entertainment; since we look upon that as gain, which is expended with a pious purpose, in the relief and refreshment of all our indigent.—The occasion of our entertainment being so honourable, you may judge of the manner of its being conducted; it consists in the discharge of religious duties; it admits nothing vile, nothing immodest. Before we sit down, prayer is made to God. The hungry eat as much as they desire, and every one drinks as much as can be useful to sober men. We so feast, as men who have their

minds impressed with the idea of spending the night in the worship of God; we so converse, as men who are conscious that the Lord heareth them, &c." Perhaps you may object to this testimony, in favour of the innocence of Christian meetings, as liable to partiality, because it is the testimony of a Christian; and you may, perhaps, be able to pick out, from the writings of this Christian, something that looks like a contradiction of this account; however, I will rest the matter upon this testimony for the present; forbearing to quote any other Christian writer upon the subject, as I shall in a future letter produce you a testimony superior to every objection. You speak too of the agapæ as an essential part of the public worship: this is not according to your usual accuracy; for, had they been essential, the edict of an heathen magistrate would not have been able to put a stop to them; yet Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, expressly says, that the Christians left them off, upon his publishing an edict prohibiting assemblies; and we know that, in the council of Carthage, in the fourth century, on account of the abuses which attended them, they began to be interdicted, and ceased almost universally in the fifth.

I have but two observations to make upon what you have advanced concerning the severity of ecclesiastical penance: the first is, that even you yourself do not deduce its institution from the Scripture, but from the power which every voluntary society has over its own members; and therefore, however extravagant, or however absurd; however opposite to the attributes of a commiserating God, or the feelings of a fallible man, it may be thought; or upon whatever trivial occasion, such as that you mention of calumniating a Bishop, a Presbyter, or even a Deacon, it may have been inflicted; Christ and his Apostles are not answerable for it. The other is, that it was, of all possible expedients, the least fitted to accomplish the end for which you think it was introduced, the propagation of Christianity. The sight of a penitent humbled by a public confession, emaciated by fasting, clothed in sackcloth, prostrated at the door of the assembly, and imploring for years together the pardon of his offences, and re-admission into the bosom of the church, was a much more likely means of deterring the Pagans from Christian community, than the pious liberality you mention was of alluring them into it. This pious

liberality, Sir, would exhaust even your elegant powers of description, before you could exhibit it in the amiable manner it deserves; it is derived from the *new commandment of loving one another*; and it has ever been the distinguishing characteristic of Christians, as opposed to every other denomination of men, Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans. In the times of the Apostles, and in the first ages of the church, it shewed itself in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and the persecuted, the infirm and the unfortunate: as soon as the church was permitted to have permanent possessions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itself in the erection of hospitals of every kind; institutions these, of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus; and for even one example of which, you will, I believe, in vain explore the boasted annals of Pagan Rome. Indeed, Sir, you will think too injuriously of this liberality, if you look upon its origin as superstitious; or upon its application as an artifice of the priesthood, to seduce the indigent into the bosom of the church: it was the pure and uncorrupted fruit of genuine Christianity.

You are much *surprised*, and not a little *con-*

cerned, that Tacitus and the younger Pliny have spoken so slightly of the Christian system; and that Seneca and the elder Pliny have not vouchsafed to mention it at all. This difficulty seems to have struck others, as well as yourself; and I might refer you to the conclusion of the second volume of Dr. Lardner's Collection of Ancient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of the Christian Religion, for full satisfaction in this point; but perhaps an observation or two may be sufficient to diminish your surprise.

Obscure sectaries of upright morals, when they separate themselves from the religion of their country, do not speedily acquire the attention of men of letters. The historians are apprehensive of depreciating the dignity of their learned labour, and contaminating their splendid narration of illustrious events, by mixing with it a disgusting detail of religious combinations; and the philosophers are usually too deeply engaged in abstract science, or in exploring the infinite intricacy of natural appearances, to busy themselves with what they, perhaps hastily, esteem popular superstitions. Historians and Philosophers, of no mean reputation, might be men-

tioned, I believe, who were the contemporaries of Luther and the first reformers; and who have passed over in negligence or contemptuous silence, their daring and unpopular attempts to shake the stability of St. Peter's Chair. Opposition to the religion of a people must become general, before it can deserve the notice of the civil magistrate; and till it does that, it will mostly be thought below the animadversion of distinguished writers. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the case in point. The first Christians, as Christ had foretold, were *hated of all men for his name's sake:* it was the name itself, not any vices adhering to the name, which Pliny punished; and they were every where held in exceeding contempt, till their numbers excited the apprehension of the ruling powers. The philosophers considered them as enthusiasts, and neglected them; the priests opposed them as innovators, and calumniated them; the great overlooked them, and the learned despised them; and the curious alone, who examined into the foundation of their faith, believed them. But the negligence of some half dozen of writers (most of them however bear incidental testimony to the truth of several facts respecting Christianity) in not relating

circumstantially the origin, the progress, and the pretensions of a new sect, is a very insufficient reason for questioning either the evidence of the principles upon which it was built, or the supernatural power by which it was supported.

The Roman historians, moreover, were not only culpably incurious concerning the Christians, but unpardonably ignorant of what concerned either them or the Jews; I say, unpardonably ignorant; because the means of information were within their reach: the writings of Moses were every where to be had in Greek; and the works of Josephus were published before Tacitus wrote his history; and yet even Tacitus has fallen into great absurdity, and self-contradiction, in his account of the Jews; and though Tertullian's zeal carried him much too far, when he called him *Mendaciorum loquacissimus*, yet one cannot help regretting the little pains he took to acquire proper information upon that subject. He derives the name of the Jews, by a forced interpolation, from mount Ida in Crete*; and

* Inclytum in Creta Idam montem accolas Idæos aucto in barbarum cognomento Judæos vocitari.—Tac. Hist. l. 5. sub init.

he represents them as abhorring all kinds of images in public worship, and yet accuses them of having placed the image of an Ass in the holy of holies: and presently after he tells us, that Pompey, when he profaned the Temple, found the sanctuary entirely empty. Similar inaccuracies might be noticed in Plutarch, and other writers who have spoken of the Jews; and you yourself have referred to an obscure passage in Suetonius, as offering a proof how strangely the Jews and Christians of Rome were confounded with each other. Why then should we think it remarkable, that a few celebrated writers, who looked upon the Christians as an obscure sect of the Jews, and upon the Jews as a barbarous and detested people, whose history was not worth the perusal, and who were moreover engaged in the relation of the great events which either occasioned or accompanied the ruin of their eternal empire; why should we be surprised, that men occupied in such interesting subjects, and influenced by such inveterate prejudices, should have left us but short and imperfect descriptions of the Christian system?

"But how shall we excuse," you say, "the supine

inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world, to those evidences, which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses?"—"The laws of nature were perpetually suspended, for the benefit of the church; but the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle"—To their shame be it spoken, that they did so—"and pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world."—To this objection I answer, in the first place, that we have no reason to believe that miracles were performed as often as philosophers deigned to give their attention to them; or that, at the period of time you allude to, the laws of nature were *perpetually* suspended for the benefit of the church. It may be, that not one of the few heathen writers, whose books have escaped the ravages of time, was ever present, when a miracle was wrought; but will it follow, because Pliny, or Plutarch, or Galen, or Seneca, or Suetonius, or Tacitus, had never seen a miracle, that no miracles were ever performed? They indeed were learned and observant men; and it may be a matter of surprise to us, that miracles so cele-

brated as the friends of Christianity suppose the Christian ones to have been, should never have been mentioned by them though they had not seen them; and had an Adrian or a Vespasian been the authors of but a thousandth part of the miracles you have ascribed to the primitive church, more than one probably of these very historians, philosophers as they were, would have adorned his history with the narration of them: for though they turned aside from the awful spectacle of the miracles of a poor despised Apostle—yet they beheld with exulting complacency, and have related with unsuspecting credulity, the ostentatious tricks of a Roman Emperor. It was not for want of faith in miraculous events that these sages neglected the Christian miracles, but for want of candour and impartial examination.

I answer, in the second place, that in the Acts of the Apostles we have an account of a great multitude of Pagans of every condition of life, who were so far from being inattentive to the evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence to their senses, that they contemplated them with reverence and wonder; and

forsaking the religion of their ancestors, and all the flattering hopes of worldly profit, reputation, and tranquillity, adhered with astonishing resolution to the profession of Christianity. From the conclusion of the Acts, till the time in which some of the sages you mention flourished, is a very obscure part of church history; yet we are certain that many of the Pagan, and we have some reason to believe, that not a few of the philosophic world, during that period, did not turn aside from the awful spectacle of miracles, but saw and believed: and that a few others should be found, who probably had never seen, and therefore would not believe, is surely no very extraordinary circumstance. Why should we not answer to objections, such as these, with the boldness of St. Jerome; and bid Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, and their followers, learn the illustrious characters of the men who founded, built up, and adorned the Christian church?*

* Discant Celsus, Porphyrius, Julianus, rabidi adversus Christum canes, discant eorum sectatores, qui putant Ecclesiam nullos Philosophos et eloquentes, nullos habuisse Doctores; quanti et quales viri eam fundaverint, extruxerint, ornaverintque; et desinant fidem nostram rusticæ tantum simplicitatis arguere, suamque potius imperitiam agnoscant. —Jero. Præ. Lib. de Illus. Eccl. Scrip.

Why should we not tell them, with Arnobius, of the orators, the grammarians, the rhetoricians, the lawyers, the physicians, the philosophers, who appeared conscious of the alterations in the moral and physical government of the world; and, from that consciousness, forsook the ordinary occupations of life and study, and attached themselves to the Christian discipline* ?

I answer, in the last place, that the miracles of Christians were falsely attributed to magic; and were for that reason thought unworthy the notice of the writers you have referred to. Suetonius, in his life of Nero, calls the Christians, men of a new and magical superstition†: I am sensible that you laugh at those "sagacious commentators," who translate the original word by magical; and adopting the idea of Mosheim, you think it ought to be rendered mischievous or pernicious: unquestionably it frequently has that meaning; with due deference, however, to Mosheim and yourself, I cannot help being of

* Arnob. con. Gen. l. 11.

† Genus hominum superstitionis novæ et *maleficæ*.—Suet. in Nero. c. 16.

opinion, that in this place, as descriptive of the Christian religion, it is rightly translated magical. The Theodosian Code must be my excuse, for dissenting from such respectable authority, and in it, I conjecture, you will find good reason for being of my opinion *. Nor ought any friend to Christianity to be astonished or alarmed at Suetonius applying the word Magical to the Christian religion; for the miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles principally consisted in alleviating the distresses, by curing the obstinate diseases of human kind; and the proper meaning of magic, as understood by the ancients, is a higher and more holy branch of the art of healing †. The elder Pliny lost his life in an eruption of Vesuvius, about forty-seven years after the death of Christ: some fifteen years before the

* Chaldæi, ac *Magi*, et cæteri quos vulgus *maleficos* ob facinorum magnitudinem appellat.——Si quis *magus* vel magicis contaminibus adsuetus, qui *maleficus* vulgi consuetudine nuncupatur. IX Cod. Theodos. tit. XVI.

† Pliny, speaking of the origin of magic, says, Natam primum e medicina nemo dubitat, ac specie salutari irrepsisse velut *altiorem sanctioremque medicinam*.—He afterwards says, that it was mixed with mathematical arts; and thus *magici* and *mathematici* are joined by Pliny, as *malefici* and *magici* are in the Theodosian Code. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. 30. c. 1.

death of Pliny, the Christians were persecuted at Rome for a crime, of which every person knew them innocent; but from the description which Tacitus gives, of the low estimation they were held in at that time, (for which, however, he assigns no cause; and therefore we may reasonably conjecture it was the same for which the Jews were every where become so odious, an opposition to Polytheism,) and of the extreme sufferings they underwent, we cannot be much surprised, that their name is not to be found in the works of Pliny or of Seneca: the sect itself must, by Nero's persecution, have been almost destroyed in Rome; and it would have been uncourtly, not to say unsafe, to have noticed an order of men, whose innocence an Emperor had determined to traduce, in order to divert the dangerous, but deserved stream of popular censure from himself. Notwithstanding this, there is a passage in the Natural History of Pliny, which, how much soever it may have been overlooked, contains, I think, a very strong allusion to the Christians; and clearly intimates, he had heard of their miracles. In speaking concerning the origin of magic, he says—there is also another faction of magic, derived from the Jews,

Moses, and Lotopea, and subsisting at present *. —The word faction does not ill denote the opinion the Romans entertained of the religious associations of the Christians†; and a magical faction implies their pretensions, at least to the miraculous gifts of healing; and its descending from Moses, is according to the custom of the Romans, by which they confounded the Christians with the Jews; and its being then subsisting, seems to have a strong reference to the rumours Pliny had negligently heard reported of the Christians.

Submitting each of these answers to your cool and candid consideration, I proceed to take notice of another difficulty in your fifteenth chapter, which some have thought one of the most important in your whole book—The silence of profane historians concerning the preternatural

* Est et alia magices *factio*, a Mose, *etiamnum* et Lotopea Judæis pendens. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. 30. c. 2. Edit. Hardu. —Dr. Lardner and others have made slight mention of this passage, probably from their reading in bad editions *Jamne* for *etiamnum*, a Mose et Jamne et Jotape Judæis pendens.

† Tertullian reckons the sect of the Christians, inter licitas *factiones*. Ad. c. 38.

darkness at the crucifixion of Christ.—You know, Sir, that several learned men are of opinion, that profane history is not silent upon this subject; I will, however, put their authority for the present quite out of the question. I will neither trouble you with the testimony of Phlegon, nor with the appeal of Tertullian to the public registers of the Romans; but meeting you upon your own ground, and granting you every thing you desire, I will endeavour, from a fair and candid examination of the history of this event, to suggest a doubt, at least to your mind, whether this was "the greatest phænomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe."

This darkness is mentioned by three of the four Evangelists; St. Matthew thus expresses himself:—*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour;* St. Mark says—*And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour;* St. Luke—*And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened.* The three Evangelists agree, that

there was darkness;—and they agree in the extent of the darkness: for it is the same expression in the original, which our translators have rendered *earth* in Luke, and *land* in the two other accounts; and they agree in the duration of the darkness, it lasted three hours:—Luke adds a particular circumstance, *that the sun was darkened.* I do not know whether this event be any where else mentioned in Scripture, so that our inquiry can neither be extensive nor difficult.

In philosophical property of speech, darkness consists in the total absence of light, and admits of no degrees; however, in the more common acceptation of the word, there are degrees of darkness, as well as of light; and as the Evangelists have said nothing, by which the particular degree of darkness can be determined, we have as much reason to suppose it was slight, as you have that it was excessive; but if it was slight, though it had extended itself over the surface of the whole globe, the difficulty of its not being recorded by Pliny or Seneca vanishes at once *. Do you not perceive, Sir, upon

* The author of L'Evangile de la Raison is mistaken in saying, that the Evangelists speak of a *thick darkness;* and that mistake has led him into another, into a disbelief of the

what a slender foundation this mighty objection is grounded; when we have only to put you upon proving, that the darkness at the crucifixion was of so unusual a nature, as to have excited the particular attention of all mankind, or even of those who were witnesses to it? But I do not mean to deal so logically with you; rather give me leave to spare you the trouble of your proof, by proving, or shewing the probability at least of the direct contrary. There is a circumstance mentioned by St. John, which seems to indicate, that the darkness was not so excessive, as is generally supposed; for it is probable that, during the continuance of the darkness, Jesus spoke both to his mother and his beloved disciple, whom he *saw* from the cross; they were near the cross; but the soldiers which surrounded it must have kept them at too great a distance, for Jesus to have *seen* them and *know* them, had the darkness at the crucifixion been excessive, like the preternatural darkness which God brought upon

event, because it has not been mentioned by the writers of the times—Ces historiens (the Evangelists) ont le front de nous dire, qu'à sa mort la terre a été couverte d'épaisses ténèbres en plein midi et en pleine lune; comme si tous les écrivains de ce tems-là n'auroient pas remarqué un si étrange miracle!—L'Evan. de la Rais. p. 99.

the land of Egypt; for it is expressly said that, during the continuance of that darkness, *they saw not one another*. The expression in St. Luke, *the sun was darkened*, tends rather to confirm than to overthrow this reasoning. I am sensible this expression is generally thought equivalent to another—the sun was eclipsed;—but the Bible is open to us all; and there can be no presumption in endeavouring to investigate the meaning of Scripture for ourselves. Luckily for the present argumentation, the very phrase of the sun's being darkened, occurs, in so many words, in one other place (and in only one) of the New Testament; and from that place you may possibly see reason to imagine, that the darkness might not, perhaps, have been so intense as to deserve the particular notice of the Roman naturalists:—*And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun was darkened**, *and the air, by reason of the smoke of the pit.* If we should say, that the sun at the crucifixion was obnubilated, and darkened by the intervention of clouds, as it is here represented to be by the

*——και ἐσκοτισθη ὁ ἡλιος. Αποκ. ix. 2.

intervention of a smoke like the smoke of a furnace, I do not see what you could object to in our account; but such a phænomenon has surely no right to be esteemed the greatest that mortal eye has ever beheld. I may be mistaken in this interpretation; but I have no design to misrepresent the fact, in order to get rid of a difficulty; the darkness may have been as intense as many commentators have supposed it: but neither they nor you can prove it was so; and I am surely under no necessity, upon this occasion, of granting you, out of deference to any commentator, what you can neither prove nor render probable.

But you still, perhaps, may think, that the darkness, by its extent, made up for this deficiency in point of intenseness. The original word, expressive of its extent, is sometimes interpreted by the whole earth; more frequently, in the New Testament, of any little portion of the earth: for we read of the land of Judah, of the land of Israel, of the land of Zabulon, and of the land of Nephthalim; and it may very properly, I conceive, be translated in the place in question by *region*. But why should all the

world take notice of a darkness which extended itself for a few miles about Jerusalem, and lasted but three hours? The Italians, especially, had no reason to remark the event as singular; since they were accustomed at that time, as they are at present, to see the *neighbouring regions* so darkened for days together by the eruptions of Ætna and Vesuvius, that no man could know his neighbour*. We learn from the Scripture account, that an earthquake accompanied this darkness; and a dark clouded sky, I apprehend, very frequently precedes an earthquake; but its extent is not great, nor is its intenseness excessive, nor is the phænomenon itself so unusual, as not commonly to pass unnoticed in ages of science and history. I fear I may be liable to misrepresentation in this place; but I beg it may be observed, that however slight in degree, or however confined in extent the darkness at the crucifixion may have been; I am of opinion,

*——Nos autem tenebras cogitemus tantas, quantæ quondam eruptione Etnæorum ignium *finitimas regiones obscuravisse* dicuntur, ut per biduum nemo hominem homo agnosceret. Cic. de Nat. Deo. l. 2. And Pliny, in describing the eruption of Vesuvius which suffocated his uncle, says—Dies alibi, illic nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiorque.

that the power of God was as supernaturally exerted in its production and in that of the earthquake which accompanied it, as in the opening of the graves, and the resurrection of the saints, which followed the resurrection of Christ.

In another place, you seem not to believe "that Pontius Pilate informed the emperor of the unjust sentence of death, which he had pronounced against an innocent person." And the same reason which made him silent as to the death, ought, one would suppose, to have made him silent as to the miraculous events which accompanied it: and if Pilate, in his dispatches to the Emperor, transmitted no account of the darkness (how great soever you suppose it to have been) which happened in a distant province; I cannot apprehend, that the report of it could have ever gained such credit at Rome, as to induce either Pliny or Seneca to mention it as an authentic fact.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

SIR,

I MEAN not to detain you long with my remarks upon your sixteenth Chapter; for in a short Apology for Christianity, it cannot be expected that I should apologize at length for the indiscretion of the first Christians. Nor have I any disposition to reap a malicious pleasure from exaggerating what you have had so much good-natured pleasure in extenuating, the truculent barbarity of their Roman persecutors.

M. de Voltaire has embraced every opportunity of contrasting the persecuting temper of the Christians with the mild tolerance of the ancient heathens; and I never read a passage of his upon this subject without thinking Christianity materially, if not intentionally, obliged to him, for his endeavour to depress the lofty spirit of religious bigotry. I may with justice pay the same compliment to you; and I do it with sincerity; heartily wishing that, in the prosecution of your work, you may render every species of intole-

rance universally detestable. There is no reason why you should abate the asperity of your invective; since no one can suspect you of a design to traduce Christianity, under the guise of a zeal against persecution; or if any one should be so simple, he need but open the gospel to be convinced, that such a scheme is too palpably absurd to have ever entered the head of any sensible and impartial man.

I wish, for the credit of human nature, that I could find reason to agree with you in what you have said of the "universal toleration of Polytheism; of the mild indifference of antiquity; of the Roman Princes beholding, without concern, a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway." But there are some passages in the Roman History, which make me hesitate at least in this point; and almost induce me to believe that the Romans were exceedingly jealous of all foreign religions, whether they were accompanied with immoral manners or not.

It was the Roman custom, indeed, to invite the tutelary gods of the nations which they in-

tended to subdue, to abandon their charge; and to promise them the same, or even a more august worship in the city of Rome *; and their triumphs were graced as much with the exhibition of their captive gods, as with the less humane one of their captive kings †. But this custom, though it filled the city with hundreds of gods of every country, denomination, and quality, cannot be brought as a proof of Roman toleration; it may indicate the excess of their vanity, the extent of their superstition, or the refinement of their policy; but it can never shew that the religion of individuals, when it differed from public wisdom, was either connived at as a matter of indifference, or tolerated as an inalienable right of human nature.

Upon another occasion, you, Sir, have referred to Livy as relating the introduction and sup-

* In oppugnationibus, ante omnia solitum a Romanis sacerdotibus evocari deum cujus in tutelâ id oppidum esset; promittique illi eundem, aut ampliorem apud Romanos cultum. Plin. Nat. Hist. l. xxxviii. c. iv.

† Roma triumphantis quotiens Ducis inclita currum
Plausibus excepit, totiens altaria Divûm
Addidit spoliis, sibimet nova numina fecit.

PRUDEN.

pression of the rites of Bacchus; and in that very place we find him confessing, that the prohibiting all foreign religions, and the abolishing every mode of sacrifice which differed from the Roman mode, was a business frequently entrusted by their ancestors to the care of the proper magistrates; and he gives us this reason for the procedure: That nothing could contribute more effectually to the ruin of religion, than the sacrificing after an external rite, and not after the manner instituted by their fathers *.

Not thirty years before this event, the Prætor, in conformity to a decree of the senate, had issued an edict—that no one should presume to sacrifice in any public place after a new or foreign manner †. And in a still more early pe-

* Quoties hoc patrum avorumque ætate negotium est magistratibus datum, ut sacra externa fieri vetarent? sacrificulos vātesque foro, circo, urbe prohiberent? *vaticinos libros conquirerent comburerentque?* omnem disciplinam sacrificandi, præterquam more Romano, abolerent? Judicabant enim prudentissimi viri omnis divini humanique juris, nihil æque dissolvendæ religionis esse, quam ubi non patrio, sed externo ritu sacrificaretur.—Liv. l. xxxix. c. xvi.

† Ut quicumque *libros vaticinos precationesve*, aut artem sacrificandi conscriptam haberet, eos libros omnes litterasque

riod, the Ædiles had been commanded to take care, that no gods were worshipped except the Roman gods; and that the Roman gods were worshipped after no manner but the established manner of the country*.

But to come nearer to the times of which you are writing. In Dion Cassius you may meet with a great courtier, one of the interior cabinet, and a polished statesman, in a set speech upon the most momentous subject, expressing himself to the Emperor, agreeable enough to the practice of antiquity, but utterly inconsistent with the most remote idea of religious toleration. The speech alluded to, contains, I confess it, nothing more than the advice of an individual; but it ought to be remembered, that *that* individual was Mæcenas, that the advice was given to Augustus, and that the occasion of giving it was no less important than the settling the form of the Ro-

ad se ante Kalendas Apriles deferret: neu quis in publico sacrove loco, novo aut externo ritu sacrificarent. Liv. l. xxv. c. l.

* Datum inde negotium ædilibus, ut animadverterent, ne qui, nisi Romani dii, neu quo alio more quam patrio, colerentur.—Liv. l. iv. c. 30.

man government. He recommends it to Cæsar, to worship the gods himself according to the established form; and to *force* all others to do the same; and to *hate* and to *punish* all those who should attempt to introduce foreign religions*: nay, he bids him, in the same place, have an eye upon the philosophers also; so that free thinking, free speaking at least, upon religious matters, was not quite so safe under the gentle sway of the Roman princes, as, thank God, it is under the much more gentle government of our own.

In the Edict of Toleration published by Galerius after six years' unremitted persecution of the Christians, we perceive his motive for persecution to have been the same with that which had influenced the conduct of the more ancient Romans, an abhorrence of all innovations in religion. You have favoured us with the translation of this edict, in which he says—"we were particularly desirous of reclaiming into the way of rea-

* Ταυτα τε ουτω πρατΐε, και προσετι το μεν θειον παντη παντως αυτος τε σεβου, κατα τα πατρια, και τους αλλους τιμαν αναγκαζε· τους δε δη ξενιζοντας τι περι αυτο και μισει και κολαζε. Dion. Cas. l. 52.

son and nature," *ad bonas mentes*, (a good pretence this for a polytheistic persecutor) " the deluded Christians who had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by their fathers"—this is the precise language of Livy, describing a persecution of a foreign religion three hundred years before, *turba erat nec sacrificantium nec precantium Deos patrio more*. And the very expedient of forcing the Christians to deliver up their religious books, which was practised in this persecution, and which Mosheim attributes to the advice of Hierocles, and you to that of the philosophers of those times, seems clear to me, from the places in Livy before quoted, to have been nothing but an old piece of state policy, to which the Romans had recourse as often as they apprehended their established religion to be in any danger.

In the preamble of the letter of toleration, which the emperor Maximin reluctantly wrote to Sabinus about a year after the publication of Galerius' Edict, there is a plain avowal of the reasons which induced Galerius and Diocletian to commence their persecution; they had seen the temples of the gods forsaken, and were de-

termined by the severity of punishment to reclaim men to their worship*.

In short, the system recommended by Mæcenas, of forcing every person to be of the emperor's religion, and of hating and punishing every innovator, contained no new doctrine; it was correspondent to the practice of the Roman senate, in the most illustrious times of the republic; and seems to have been generally adopted by the emperors, in their treatment of Christians, whilst they themselves were Pagans; and in their treatment of Pagans, after they themselves became Christians; and if any one should be willing to derive those laws against Heretics (which are so abhorrent from the mild spirit of the gospel, and so reproachful to the Roman code) from the blind adherence of the Christian emperors to the intolerant policy of their Pagan predecessors, something, I think, might be produced in support of his conjecture.

* Συνειδον σχεδον απαντας ανθρωπους, καταλειφθεισης της των θεων θρησκειας, τω εθνει των Χριστιανων εαυτους συμμεμιχοτας. Ορθως διατεταχεναι παντας ανθρωπους τους απο των θεων των αθανατων αναχωρησαντας, προ δηλω κολασει και τιμωρια εις την θρησκειαν των θεων ανακληθηναι. Euseb. lib. ix. c. 4.

But I am sorry to have said so much upon such a subject.—In endeavouring to palliate the severity of the Romans towards the Christians, you have remarked, "it was in vain, that the oppressed believer asserted the inalienable rights of conscience and private judgment."—"Though his situation might excite the pity, his arguments could never reach the understanding, either of the philosophic, or of the believing part of the Pagan world." How is this, Sir? Are the arguments for liberty of conscience so exceedingly inconclusive, that you think them incapable of reaching the understanding, even of philosophers? A captious adversary would embrace with avidity the opportunity this passage affords him, of blotting your character with the odious stain of being a persecutor; a stain, which no learning can wipe out, which no genius or ability can render amiable. I am far from entertaining such an opinion of your principles; but this conclusion seems fairly deducible from what you have said—that the minds of the Pagans were so pre-occupied with the notions of forcing, and hating, and punishing those who differed from them in religion, that arguments for the inalienable rights of conscience, which would have convinced your-

self and every philosopher in Europe, and staggered the resolution of an inquisitor, were incapable of reaching their understandings, or making any impression on their hearts; and you might, perhaps, have spared yourself some perplexity, in the investigation of the motives which induced the Roman emperors to persecute, and the Roman people to hate the Christians, if you had not overlooked the true one, and adopted with too great facility the erroneous idea of the extreme tolerance of Pagan Rome.

The Christians, you observe, were accused of atheism:—and it must be owned that they were the greatest of all atheists, in the opinion of the polytheists; for, instead of Hesiod's thirty thousand gods, they could not be brought to acknowledge above One; and even that One they refused, at the hazard of their lives, to blaspheme with the appellation of Jupiter. But is it not somewhat singular, that the pretensions of the Christians to a constant intercourse with superior beings, in the working of miracles, should have been a principal cause of converting to their faith, those who branded them with the imputation of atheism?

They were accused, too, of forming dangerous conspiracies against the state:—This accusation, you own, was as unjust as the preceding; but there seems to have been a peculiar hardship in the situation of the Christians; since the very same men who thought them dangerous to the state, on account of their conspiracies, condemned them, as you have observed, for not interfering in its concerns; for their criminal disregard to the business of war and government; and for their entertaining doctrines, which were supposed "to prohibit them from assuming the character of soldiers, of magistrates, and of princes;" men, such as these, would have made but poor conspirators.

They were accused, lastly, of the most horrid crimes:—This accusation, it is confessed, was mere calumny; yet, as calumny is generally more extensive in its influence than truth, perhaps this calumny might be more powerful in stopping the progress of Christianity, than the virtues of the Christians were in promoting it: and in truth, Origen observes that the Christians, on account of the crimes which were maliciously laid to their charge, were held in such abhorrence, that no

one would so much as speak to them. It may be worth while to remark from him, that the Jews, in the very beginning of Christianity, were the authors of all those calumnies, which Celsus afterwards took such great delight in urging against the Christians, and which you have mentioned with such great precision *.

It is no improbable supposition, that the clandestine manner in which the persecuting spirit of the Jews and Gentiles obliged the Christians to celebrate their Eucharist, together with the expressions of eating the body, and drinking the blood of Christ, which were used in its institution, and the custom of imparting a kiss of charity to each other, and of calling each other by the appellations of brother and sister †, gave occa-

* Videtur mihi fecisse idem Celsus, quod Judæi, qui sub Christianismi initium errorem sparsêre, quasi ejus sectæ homines mactati pueri vescerentur carnibus; et quod, quoties eis libeat operam dare occultis libidinibus, extincto lumine constupret, quam quisque nactus fuerit. Quæ falsa et iniqua opinio dudum valdè multos a religione nostra alienos tenuit; persuasos, quod tales sint Christiani; et ad hoc temporis nonnullos fallit, qui eâ de causâ Christianos aversantur, ut nec simplex colloquium cum eis habere velint.—Orig. con. Cels. lib. VI.

† The Romans used these expressions in so impure a

sions to their enemies to invent, and induced careless observers to believe, all the odious things which were said against the Christians.

You have displayed at length, in expressive diction, the accusations of the enemies of Christianity; and you have told us of the imprudent defence by which the Christians vindicated the purity of their morals; and you have huddled up in a short note (which many a reader will never see) the testimony of Pliny to their innocence. Permit me to do the Christians a little justice, by producing in their cause the whole truth.

Between seventy and eighty years after the death of Christ, Pliny had occasion to consult the emperor Trajan concerning the manner in which he should treat the Christians; it seems as if there had been judicial proceedings against them, though Pliny had never happened to attend any of them. He knew, indeed, that men were to be punished for being Christians, or he would not, as a sensible magistrate, have received the accusations of legal, much less of illegal, ano-

sense, that Martial calls them Nomina nequiora.—Lib. II. epig. IV.

nymous informers against them; nor would he, before he wrote to the emperor, have put to death those whom his threats could not hinder from persevering in their confession, that they were Christians. His harsh manner of proceeding "in an office the most repugnant to his humanity," had made many apostatize from their profession: persons of this complexion were well fitted to inform him of every thing they knew concerning the Christians; accordingly he examined them; but not one of them accused the Christians of any other crime than of praying to Christ, as to some God, and of binding themselves by an oath, not to be guilty of any wickedness. Not contented with this information, he put two maidservants, which were called ministers, to the torture; but even the rack could not extort from the imbecility of the sex a confession of any crime, any account different from that which the apostates had voluntarily given; not a word do we find of their feasting upon murdered infants, or of their mixing in incestuous commerce. After all his pains, Pliny pronounced the meal of the Christians to be *promiscuous* and *innocent*: persons of both sexes, of all ages, and of every condition, assembled promiscuously together;

there was nothing for chastity to blush at, or for humanity to shudder at, in these meetings; there was no secret initiation of proselytes by abhorred rites; but they eat a promiscuous meal in Christian charity, and with the most perfect innocence *.

Whatever faults then the Christians may have been guilty of in after-times; though you could produce to us a thousand ambitious prelates of Carthage, or sensual ones of Antioch, and blot ten thousand pages with the impurities of the Christian clergy; yet at this period, whilst the memory of Christ and his Apostles was fresh in their minds; or, in the more emphatic language of Jerome, "whilst the blood of our Lord was warm, and recent faith was fervent in the believers;" we have the greatest reason to conclude, that they were eminently distinguished

* —Affirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire; carmenque Christo, quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem; seque sacramento non *in scelus* aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent: quibus peractis, morem sibi discedendi fuisse, rursusque cöeundi ad capiendum cibum, *promiscuum* tamen, *et innoxium*.—Plin. Epis. XCVII. lib. x.

for the probity and the purity of their lives. Had there been but a shadow of a crime in their assemblies, it must have been detected by the industrious search of the intelligent Pliny; and it is a matter of real surprise, that no one of the apostates thought of paying court to the governor by a false testimony; especially, as their apostasy seems to have been exceeding general: since the temples, which had been almost deserted, began again to be frequented; and the victims, for which a little time before scarce a purchaser was to be found, began again every where to be bought up. This, Sir, is a valuable testimony in our favour; it is not that of a declaiming apologist, of a deluding priest, or of a deluded martyr, of an orthodox bishop, or of any "of the most pious of men" the Christians; but it is that of a Roman magistrate, philosopher, and lawyer; who cannot be supposed to have wanted inclination to detect the immoralities or the conspiracies of the Christians; since, in his treatment of them, he had stretched the authority of his office, and violated alike the laws of his country, and of humanity.

With this testimony I will conclude my re-

marks: for I have no disposition to blacken the character you have given of Nero; or to lessen the humanity of the Roman magistrates; or to magnify the number of Christians, or of martyrs; or to undertake the defence of a few fanatics, who by their injudicious zeal brought ruin upon themselves, and disgrace upon their profession. I may not probably have convinced you that you are wrong in any thing which you have advanced; or that the authors you have quoted, will not support you in the inferences you have drawn from their works; or that Christianity ought to be distinguished from its corruptions: yet I may, perhaps, have had the good fortune to lessen, in the minds of others, some of that dislike to the Christian religion which the perusal of your book had unhappily excited. I have touched but upon general topics; for I should have wearied out your patience, to say nothing of my readers', or my own, had I enlarged upon every thing in which I dissent from you; and a minute examination of your work would, moreover, have had the appearance of a captious disposition to descend into illiberal personalities; and might have produced a certain acrimony of sentiment or expression, which may be serviceable in supplying

the place of argument, or adding a zest to a dull composition; but has nothing to do with the investigation of truth. Sorry shall I be, if what I have written should give the least interruption to the prosecution of the great work in which you are engaged: the world is now possessed of the opinion of us both upon the subject in question; and it may, perhaps, be proper for us both to leave it in this state. I say not this from any backwardness to acknowledge my mistakes, when I am convinced that I am in an error, but to express the almost insuperable reluctance which I feel to the bandying abusive argument in public controversy: it is not, in good truth, a difficult task to chastise the froward petulance of those who mistake personal invective for reasoning, and clumsy banter for ingenuity; but it is a dirty business at best, and should never be undertaken by a man of any temper, except when the interests of truth may suffer by his neglect. Nothing of this nature, I am sensible, is to be expected from you; and if any thing of the kind has happened to escape myself, I hereby disclaim the intention of saying it, and heartily wish it unsaid.

Will you permit me, Sir, through this channel (I may not, perhaps, have another so good an opportunity of doing it) to address a few words, not to yourself, but to a set of men who disturb all serious company with their profane declamation against Christianity; and who having picked up in their travels, or the writings of the deists, a few flimsy objections, infect with their ignorant and irreverent ridicule the ingenuous minds of the rising generation?

GENTLEMEN,

Suppose the mighty work accomplished, the cross trampled upon, Christianity every where proscribed, and the religion of Nature once more become the religion of Europe; what advantage will you have derived to your country, or to yourselves, from the exchange? I know your answer—you will have freed the world from the hypocrisy of Priests, and the tyranny of Superstition.—No; you forget that Lycurgus, and Numa, and Odin, and Mango-Copac, and all the great legislators of ancient and modern story, have been of opinion, that the affairs of civil society could not be well conducted without *some* religion; you must of necessity introduce a priesthood, with probably as much hypocrisy; a religion, with assuredly more superstition, than that which you now reprobate with such indecent and ill-grounded contempt. But I will tell you from what you will have freed the world; you will have freed it from its abhorrence of vice, and from every powerful incentive to virtue; you will, with the religion, have brought back the de-

praved morality of Paganism; you will have robbed mankind of their firm assurance of another life; and thereby you will have despoiled them of their patience, of their humility, of their charity, of their chastity, of all those mild and silent virtues, which (however despicable they may appear in your eyes) are the only ones which meliorate and sublime our nature; which Paganism never knew, which spring from Christianity alone, which do or might constitute our comfort in this life, and without the possession of which, another life, if after all there should happen to be one, must (unless a miracle be exerted in the alteration of our disposition) be more vicious and more miserable than this is.

Perhaps you will contend, that the universal light of reason, that the truth and fitness of things, are of themselves sufficient to exalt the nature, and regulate the manners of mankind. Shall we never have done with this groundless commendation of natural law? Look into the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you will see the extent of its influence over the Gentiles of those days; or if you dislike Paul's authority, and the manners of antiquity,

look into the more admired accounts of modern voyagers; and examine its influence over the Pagans of our own times, over the sensual inhabitants of Otaheite, over the Cannibals of New Zealand, or the remorseless Savages of America. —But these men are barbarians. Your law of nature, notwithstanding, extends even to them. —But they have misused their reason:—they have then the more need of, and would be the more thankful for that revelation, which you, with an ignorant and fastidious self-sufficiency, deem useless.—But they might of themselves, if they thought fit, become wise and virtuous.—I answer with Cicero, *Ut nihil interest, utrum nemo valeat, an nemo valere possit; sic non intelligo quid intersit, utrum nemo sit sapiens, an nemo esse possit.*

These, however, you will think, are extraordinary instances; and that we ought not from these to take our measure of the excellency of the law of nature, but rather from the civilized states of China or Japan, or from the nations which flourished in learning and in arts, before Christianity was heard of in the world. You mean to say, that by the law of nature, which

you are desirous of substituting in the room of the gospel, you do not understand those rules of conduct, which an individual, abstracted from the community, and deprived of the institution of mankind, could excogitate for himself; but such a system of precepts, as the most enlightened men of the most enlightened ages have recommended to our observance. Where do you find this system? We cannot meet with it in the works of Stobæus, or the Scythian Anacharsis; nor in those of Plato, or of Cicero; nor in those of the Emperor Antoninus, or the slave Epictetus; for we are persuaded, that the most animated considerations of the πρεπον, and the *honestum*, of the beauty of virtue, and the firmness of things, are not able to furnish even a Brutus himself with permanent principles of action; much less are they able to purify the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart, to curb the irregularity of appetite, or restrain the impetuosity of passion in common men. If you order us to examine the works of Grotius, or Puffendorf, or Burlamaqui, or Hutcheson, for what you understand by the law of nature; we apprehend that you are in a great error, in taking your notions of natural law, as discoverable by natural reason, from

the elegant systems of it which have been drawn up by Christian Philosophers; since they have all laid their foundations, either tacitly or expressly, upon a principle derived from revelation—a thorough knowledge of the being and attributes of God: and even those amongst ourselves, who, rejecting Christianity, still continue Theists, are indebted to revelation (whether you are either aware of, or disposed to acknowledge the debt, or not) for those sublime speculations concerning the Deity, which you have fondly attributed to the excellency of your own unassisted reason. If you would know the real genius of natural law, and how far it can proceed in the investigation or enforcement of moral duties; you must consult the manners and the writings of those who have never heard of either the Jewish or the Christian dispensation, or of those other manifestations of himself, which God vouchsafed to Adam and to the Patriarchs before and after the flood. It would be difficult perhaps any where, to find a people entirely destitute of traditionary notices concerning a Deity, and of traditionary fears or expectations of another life; and the morals of mankind may have, perhaps, been no where quite so abandoned as they would have been, had they

been left wholly to themselves in these points; however, it is a truth which cannot be denied, how much soever it may be lamented, that though the generality of mankind have always had some faint conceptions of God and his providence; yet they have been always greatly inefficacious in the production of good morality, and highly derogatory to his nature, amongst all the people of the earth, except the Jews and Christians; and some may perhaps be desirous of excepting the Mahometans, who derive all that is good in their *Koran* from Christianity.

The laws concerning justice, and the reparation of damages, concerning the security of property, and the performance of contracts; concerning, in short, whatever affects the well-being of civil society, have been every where understood with sufficient precision; and if you choose to style Justinian's code, a code of natural law, though you will err against propriety of speech, yet you are so far in the right, that natural reason discovered, and the depravity of human nature compelled human kind to establish by proper sanctions the laws therein contained; and you will have moreover Carneades, no mean philo-

sopher, on your side; who knew of no law of nature different from that which men had instituted for their common utility, and which was various according to the manners of men in different climates, and changeable with a change of times in the same. And in truth, in all countries where Paganism has been the established religion, though a philosopher may now and then have stepped beyond the paltry prescript of civil jurisprudence in his pursuit of virtue; yet the bulk of mankind have ever been contented with that scanty pittance of morality which enabled them to escape the lash of civil punishment: I call it a scanty pittance, because a man may be intemperate, iniquitous, impious, a thousand ways a profligate and a villain, and yet elude the cognizance, and avoid the punishment of civil laws.

I am sensible you will be ready to say, what is all this to the purpose? Though the bulk of mankind may never be able to investigate the laws of natural religion, nor disposed to reverence their sanctions when investigated by others, nor solicitous about any other standard of moral rectitude than civil legislation; yet the inconve-

niences which may attend the extirpation of Christianity can be no proof of its truth:—I have not produced them as a proof of its truth; but they are a strong and conclusive proof, if not of its truth, at least of its utility; and the consideration of its utility may be a motive to yourselves for examining, whether it may not chance to be true; and it ought to be a reason with every good citizen, and with every man of sound judgment, to keep his opinions to himself, if, from any particular circumstances in his studies or in his education, he should have the misfortune to think that it is not true. If you can discover to the rising generation a better religion than the Christian, one that will more effectually animate their hopes and subdue their passions, make them better men or better members of society, we importune you to publish it for their advantage; but till you can do that, we beg of you not to give the reins to their passions, by instilling into their unsuspicious minds your pernicious prejudices. Even now, men scruple not, by their lawless lust, to ruin the repose of private families, and to fix a stain of infamy upon the noblest: even now, they hesitate not in lifting up a murderous arm against the life of their friend, or against their

own, as often as the fever of intemperance stimulates their resentment, or the satiety of an useless life excites their despondency: even now, whilst we are persuaded of a resurrection from the dead, and of a *judgment to come*, we find it difficult enough to resist the solicitations of sense, and to escape unspotted from the licentious manners of the world; but what will become of our virtue, what of the consequent peace and happiness of society, if you persuade us that there are no such things? In two words—you may ruin yourselves by your attempt, and you will certainly ruin your country by your success.

But the consideration of the inutility of your design, is not the only one which should induce you to abandon it; the argument *a tuto* ought to be warily managed, or it may tend to the silencing our opposition to any system of superstition, which has had the good fortune to be sanctified by public authority; it is, indeed, liable to no objection in the present case; we do not, however, wholly rely upon its cogency. It is not contended, that Christianity is to be received merely because it is useful, but because it is true. This you deny, and think your objections well grounded: we con-

ceive them originating in your vanity, your immorality, or your misapprehension. There are many worthless doctrines, many superstitious observances, which the fraud or folly of mankind have every where annexed to Christianity (especially in the church of Rome), as essential parts of it: if you take these sorry appendages to Christianity for Christianity itself, as preached by Christ, and by the Apostles; if you confound the Roman with the Christian religion, you quite misapprehend its nature, and are in a state similar to that of men mentioned by Plutarch, in his treatise of Superstition; who, flying from superstition, leapt over religion, and sunk into downright Atheism*.—Christianity is not a religion very palatable to a voluptuous age; it will not conform its precepts to the standard of

* Le Papisme (says Helvetius in a posthumous work) n'est aux yeux d'un homme sensé qu'une pure idolatrie—nous sommes étonnés de l'absurdité de la religion païenne. Celle de la religion Papiste étonnera bien d'avantage un jour la postérité.—We trust that day is not at a great distance, and deism will then be buried in the ruins of the church of Rome; for the taking the superstition, the avarice, the ambition, the intolerance of Antichristianism for Christianity, has been the great error upon which infidelity has built its system, both at home and abroad.

fashion; it will not lessen the deformity of vice by lenient appellations; but calls keeping, whoredom; intrigue, adultery; and duelling, murder: it will not pander the lust, it will not license the intemperance of mankind; it is a troublesome monitor to a man of pleasure; and your way of life may have made you quarrel with your religion.—As to your vanity, as a cause of your infidelity, suffer me to produce the sentiments of M. Bayle upon that head: if the description does not suit your character, you will not be offended at it; and if you are offended with its freedom, it will do you good. "This inclines me to believe, that Libertines, like Des-Barreaux, are not greatly persuaded of the truth of what they say. They have made no deep examination; they have learned some few objections, which they are perpetually making a noise with; they speak from a principle of ostentation, and give themselves the lie in the time of danger.—Vanity has a greater share in their disputes than conscience; they imagine that the singularity and boldness of the opinions which they maintain, will give them the reputation of men of parts; by degrees, they get a habit of holding impious discourses; and if their vanity be ac-

companied by a voluptuous life, their progress in that road is the swifter *."

The main stress of your objections rests not upon the insufficiency of the external evidence to the truth of Christianity; for few of you, though you may become the future ornaments of the senate, or of the bar, have ever employed an hour in its examination; but upon the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the New Testament: they exceed, you say, your comprehension; and you felicitate yourselves, that you are not yet arrived at the true standard of orthodox faith—*credo quia impossibile*. You think it would betaking a superfluous trouble, to inquire into the nature of the external proofs by which Christianity is established; since, in your opinion, the book itself carries with it its own refutation. A gentleman as acute, probably, as any of you, and who once believed, perhaps, as little as any of you, has drawn a quite different conclusion from the perusal of the New Testament: his book (however exceptionable it may be thought in some particular parts) exhibits, not only a distin-

* Bayle, Hist. Dict. Art. Des-Barreaux.

guished triumph of reason over prejudice, of Christianity over Deism; but it exhibits, what is infinitely more rare, the character of a man who has had courage and candour enough to acknowledge it*.

But what if there should be some incomprehensible doctrines in the Christian religion; some circumstances, which in their causes, or their consequences, surpass the reach of human reason; are they to be rejected upon that account? You are, or would be thought, men of reading, and knowledge, and enlarged understandings; weigh the matter fairly; and consider whether revealed religion be not, in this respect, just upon the same footing with every other object of your contemplation. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration itself, though you get over its first principles, and learn to digest the idea of a point without parts, a line without breadth, and a surface without thickness; yet you will find yourself at a loss to comprehend the perpetual approximation of lines which can never

* See A View of the Internal Evidence, &c. by Soame Jenyns.

meet; the doctrine of incommensurables, and of an infinity of infinities, each infinitely greater, or infinitely less, not only than any infinite quantity, but than each other. In physics, you cannot comprehend the primary cause of any thing; not of the light, by which you see; nor of the elasticity of the air, by which you hear; nor of the fire, by which you are warmed. In physiology, you cannot tell what first gave motion to the heart; nor what continues it; nor why its motion is less voluntary than that of the lungs; nor why you are able to move your arm to the right or left, by a simple volition: you cannot explain the cause of animal heat; nor comprehend the principle by which your body was at first formed, nor by which it is sustained, nor by which it will be reduced to earth. In natural religion, you cannot comprehend the eternity or omnipresence of the Deity; nor easily understand how his prescience can be consistent with your freedom, or his immutability with his government of moral agents; nor why he did not make all his creatures equally perfect; nor why he did not create them sooner: in short, you cannot look into any branch of knowledge, but you will meet with subjects above your comprehen-

sion. The fall and the redemption of human kind are not more incomprehensible than the creation and the conservation of the universe; the infinite Author of the works of providence, and of nature, is equally inscrutable, equally past our finding out in them both. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the deepest inquirers into nature have ever thought with most reverence, and spoken with most diffidence, concerning those things which, in revealed religion, may seem hard to be understood; they have ever avoided that self-sufficiency of knowledge which springs from ignorance, produces indifference, and ends in infidelity. Admirable to this purpose is the reflection of the greatest mathematician of the present age, when he is combating an opinion of Newton's by an hypothesis of his own, still less defensible than that which he opposes:—Tous les jours que je vois de ces esprits-forts, qui critique les vérités de notre religion, et s'en mocquent même avec la plus impertinente suffisance, je pense, chetifs mortels! combien et combien des choses sur lesquelles vous raisonnez si légèrement, sont elles plus sublimes, et plus elévés, que celles sur lesquelles le grand Newton s'égare si grossièrement!*

*Euler.

Plato mentions a set of men who were very ignorant, and thought themselves supremely wise, and who rejected the argument for the being of a God, derived from the harmony and order of the universe, as old and trite*. There have been men, it seems, in all ages, who, in affecting singularity, have overlooked truth: an argument, however, is not the worse for being old; and surely it would have been a more just mode of reasoning, if you had examined the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, weighed the old arguments from miracles, and from prophecies, before you had rejected the whole account from the difficulties you met with in it. You would laugh at an Indian, who in peeping into a history of England, and meeting with the mention of the Thames being frozen, or of a shower of hail, or of snow, should throw the book aside, as unworthy of his further notice, from his want of ability to comprehend these phænomena.

In considering the argument from miracles, you will soon be convinced, that it is possible for God to work miracles; and you will be convinced, that it is as possible for human testimony

* De Leg. lib. x.

to establish the truth of miraculous, as of physical or historical events; but before you can be convinced that the miracles in question are supported by such testimony as deserves to be credited, you must inquire, at what period, and by what persons, the books of the Old and New Testament were composed. If you reject the account, without making this examination, you reject it from prejudice, not from reason.

There is, however, a short method of examining this argument, which may, perhaps, make as great an impression on your minds as any other. Three men of distinguished abilities rose up at different times, and attacked Christianity with every objection which their malice could suggest, or their learning could devise: but neither Celsus in the second century, nor Porphyry in the third, nor the emperor Julian himself in the fourth century, ever questioned the reality of the miracles related in the Gospels. Do but you grant us what these men (who were more likely to know the truth of the matter than you can be) granted to their adversaries, and we will very readily let you make the most of the Magic, to which, as the last wretched shift, they

were forced to attribute them. We can find you men, in our days, who, from the mixture of two colourless liquors, will produce you a third as red as blood, or of any other colour you desire; *et dicto citius*, by a drop resembling water, will restore the transparency; they will make two fluids coalesce into a solid body; and, from the mixture of liquors colder than ice, will instantly raise you a horrid explosion and a tremendous flame; these, and twenty other tricks they will perform, without having been sent with our Saviour to Egypt to learn magic; nay, with a bottle or two of oil, they will compose the undulation of a lake; and, by a little art, they will restore the functions of life to a man, who has been an hour or two under water, or a day or two buried in the snow: but in vain will these men, or the greatest magician that Egypt ever saw, say to a boisterous sea, *Peace, be still;* in vain they will say to a carcass rotting in the grave, *Come forth:* the winds and the sea will not obey them, and the putrid carcass will not hear them. You need not suffer yourselves to be deprived of the weight of this argument, from its having been observed, that the Fathers have acknowledged the supernatural part of Paganism; since the fathers were in

no condition to detect a cheat, which was supported both by the disposition of the people, and the power of the civil magistrate*; and they were from that inability forced to attribute to infernal agency, what was too cunningly contrived to be detected, and contrived for too impious a purpose, to be credited as the work of God.

With respect to prophecy, you may, perhaps, have accustomed yourselves to consider it as originating in Asiatic enthusiasm, in Chaldean mystery, or in the subtle stratagem of interested Priests; and have given yourselves no more trouble concerning the predictions of sacred, than concerning the oracles of Pagan history. Or if you have ever cast a glance upon this subject, the dissensions of learned men concerning the proper interpretation of the Revelation, and other difficult prophecies, may have made you rashly conclude, that all prophecies were equally unintelligible, and more indebted for their accomplishment to a fortunate concurrence of events, and the pliant ingenuity of the expositor, than

* See Lord Lyttlet. Obs. on St. Paul, p. 59.

to the inspired foresight of the prophet. In all that the prophets of the Old Testament have delivered, concerning the destruction of particular cities, and the desolation of particular kingdoms, you may see nothing but shrewd conjectures, which any one acquainted with the history of the rise and fall of empires might certainly have made: and as you would not hold him for a prophet, who should now affirm, that London or Paris would afford to future ages a spectacle just as melancholy as that which we now contemplate, with a sigh, in the ruins of Agrigentum or Palmyra; so you cannot persuade yourselves to believe that the denunciation of the prophets against the haughty cities of Tyre or Babylon, for instance, proceeded from the inspiration of the Deity. There is no doubt, that by some such general kind of reasoning, many are influenced to pay no attention to an argument, which, if properly considered, carries with it the strongest conviction.

Spinoza said, That he would have broken his atheistic system to pieces, and embraced without repugnance the ordinary faith of Christians,

if he could have persuaded himself of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead; and I question not, that there are many disbelievers who would relinquish their Deistic tenets, and receive the gospel, if they could persuade themselves that God had ever so far interfered in the moral government of the world, as to illumine the mind of any one man with the knowledge of future events. A miracle strikes the senses of the persons who see it; a prophecy addresses itself to the understandings of those who behold its completion; and it requires, in many cases, some learning, in all some attention, to judge of the correspondence of events with the predictions concerning them. No one can be convinced that, what Jeremiah and the other prophets foretold of the fate of Babylon, that it should be besieged by the Medes; that it should be taken when her mighty men were drunken, when her springs were dried up; and that it should become a pool of water, and should remain desolate for ever; no one, I say, can be convinced, that all these, and other parts of the prophetic denunciation, have been minutely fulfilled, without spending some time in reading the accounts which profane his-

torians have delivered down to us concerning its being taken by Cyrus; and which modern travellers have given us of its present situation.

Porphyry was so persuaded of the coincidence between the prophecies of Daniel and the events, that he was forced to affirm, the prophecies were written after the things prophesied of had happened. Another Porphyry has, in our days, been so astonished at the correspondence between the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as related by St. Matthew, and the history of that event, as recorded by Josephus; that rather than embrace Christianity, he has ventured (contrary to the faith of all ecclesiastical history, the opinion of the learned of all ages, and all the rules of good criticism) to assert, that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel after Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed by the Romans. You may from these instances perceive the strength of the argument from prophecy; it has not been able indeed to vanquish the prejudices of either the ancient or the modern Porphyry; but it has been able to compel them both to be guilty of obvious falsehoods, which have nothing but impudent assertions to support them.

Some over-zealous interpreters of scripture have found prophecies in simple narrations, extended real predictions beyond the times and circumstances to which they naturally were applied, and perplexed their readers with a thousand quaint allusions and allegorical conceits: this proceeding has made men of sense pay less regard to prophecy in general. There are some predictions, however, such as those concerning the present state of the Jewish people, and the corruption of Christianity, which are now fulfilling in the world; and which, if you will take the trouble to examine them, you will find of such an extraordinary nature, that you will not perhaps hesitate to refer them to God as their author; and if you once become persuaded of the truth of any one miracle, or of the completion of any one prophecy, you will resolve all your difficulties (concerning the manner of God's interposition in the moral government of our species, and the nature of the doctrines contained in revelation) into your own inability fully to comprehend the whole scheme of divine Providence.

We are told, however, that the strangeness of the narration, and the difficulty of the doctrines

contained in the New Testament, are not the only circumstances which induce you to reject it; you have discovered, you think, so many contradictions in the accounts which the Evangelists have given of the life of Christ, that you are compelled to consider the whole as an ill-digested and improbable story. You would not reason thus upon any other occasion; you would not reject as fabulous the accounts given by Livy and Polybius of Hannibal and the Carthaginians, though you should discover a difference betwixt them in several points of little importance. You cannot compare the history of the same events as delivered by any two historians, but you will meet with many circumstances, which, though mentioned by one, are either wholly omitted, or differently related by the other; and this observation is peculiarly applicable to biographical writings: but no one ever thought of disbelieving the leading circumstances of the lives of Vitellius or Vespasian, because Tacitus and Suetonius did not in every thing correspond in their accounts of these emperors. And if the memoirs of the life and doctrines of M. de Voltaire himself were, some twenty or thirty years after his death, to be delivered to the world by four of his most intimate

acquaintance, I do not apprehend that we should discredit the whole account of such an extraordinary man, by reason of some slight inconsistencies and contradictions which the avowed enemies of his name might chance to discover in the several narrations. Though we should grant you then, that the Evangelists had fallen into some trivial contradictions, in what they have related concerning the life of Christ; yet you ought not to draw any other inference from our concession than that they had not plotted together, as cheats would have done, in order to give an unexceptionable consistency to their fraud. We are not however disposed to make you any such concession; we will rather shew you the futility of your general argument, by touching upon a few of the places which you think are most liable to your censure.

You observe, that neither Luke, nor Mark, nor John have mentioned the cruelty of Herod in murdering the infants of Bethlehem; and that no account is to be found of this matter in Josephus, who wrote the life of Herod; and therefore the fact recorded by Matthew is not true. —The concurrent testimony of many indepen-

dent writers concerning a matter of fact unquestionably adds to its probability; but if nothing is to be received as true, upon the testimony of a single author, we must give up some of the best writers, and disbelieve some of the most interesting facts of ancient history.

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there was only an interval of three months, you say, between the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus; from which time, taking away the forty days of the temptation, there will only remain about six weeks for the whole period of his public ministry; which lasted however, according to St. John, at the least above three years.—Your objection fairly stated stands thus: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in writing the history of Jesus Christ, mention the several events of his life, as following one another in continued succession, without taking notice of the times in which they happened: but is it a just conclusion from their silence, to infer that there really were no intervals of time between the transactions which they seem to have connected? Many instances might be produced from the most admired biographers of antiquity, in which events are related, as im-

mediately consequent to each other, which did not happen but at very distant periods; we have an obvious example of this manner of writing in St. Matthew; who connects the preaching of John the Baptist with the return of Joseph from Egypt, though we are certain that the latter event preceded the former by a great many years.

John has said nothing of the institution of the Lord's Supper; the other Evangelists have said nothing of the washing of the disciples' feet:—What then? are you not ashamed to produce these facts, as instances of contradiction? If omissions are contradictions, look into the history of the age of Louis the Fourteenth, or into the general history of M. de Voltaire, and you will meet with a great abundance of contradictions.

John, in mentioning the discourse which Jesus had with his mother and his beloved disciple, at the time of his crucifixion, says, that she with Mary Magdalene stood near the cross: Matthew, on the other hand, says, that Mary Magdalene and the other women were there, be-

holding afar off. This you think a manifest contradiction: and scoffingly inquire, whether the women and the beloved disciple, which were near the cross, could be the same with those who stood far from the cross?—It is difficult not to transgress the bounds of moderation and good manners, in answering such sophistry. What! have you to learn, that though the Evangelists speak of the crucifixion as of one event, it was not accomplished in one instant, but lasted several hours? And why the women, who were at a distance from the cross, might not, during its continuance, draw near the cross; or, from being near the cross, might not move from the cross, is more than you can explain to either us or yourselves. And we take from you your only refuge, by denying expressly, that the different Evangelists, in their mention of the women, speak of the same point of time.

The Evangelists, you affirm, are fallen into gross contradictions, in their accounts of the appearances by which Jesus manifested himself to his disciples, after his resurrection from the dead; for Matthew speaks of two, Mark of three, Luke

of two, and John of four. That contradictory propositions cannot be true, is readily granted; and if you will produce the place in which Matthew says, that Jesus Christ appeared twice and *no oftener*, it will be further granted, that he is contradicted by John in a very material part of his narration: but till you do that, you must excuse me, if I cannot grant, that the Evangelists have contradicted each other in this point; for to common understandings it is pretty evident, that if Christ appeared four times, according to John's account, he must have appeared twice, according to that of Matthew and Luke, and thrice according to that of Mark.

The different Evangelists are not only accused of contradicting each other, but Luke is said to have contradicted himself; for in his Gospel he tells us, that Jesus ascended into heaven from Bethany; and in the Acts of the Apostles, of which he is the reputed author, he informs us that he ascended from Mount Olivet.—Your objection proceeds either from your ignorance of geography, or your ill-will to Christianity; and upon either supposition deserves our contempt: be pleased, how-

ever, to remember for the future, that Bethany was not only the name of a town, but of a district of Mount Olivet adjoining to the town.

From this specimen of the contradictions ascribed to the historians of the life of Christ, you may judge for yourselves what little reason there is to reject Christianity upon their account; and how sadly you will be imposed upon (in a matter of more consequence to you than any other) if you take every thing for a contradiction, which the uncandid adversaries of Christianity think proper to call one.

Before I put an end to this address, I cannot help taking notice of an argument by which some philosophers have of late endeavoured to overturn the whole system of revelation: and it is the more necessary to give an answer to their objection, as it is become a common subject of philosophical conversation, especially amongst those who have visited the continent. The objection tends to invalidate, as is supposed, the authority of Moses, by shewing that the earth is much older than it can be proved to be from his account of the creation, and the Scripture chronology. We

contend, that six thousand years have not yet elapsed since the creation; and these philosophers contend, that they have indubitable proof of the earth's being at the least fourteen thousand years old; and they complain that Moses hangs as a dead weight upon them, and blunts all their zeal for inquiry*.

The Canonico Recupero, who, it seems, is engaged in writing the history of Mount Etna, has discovered a stratum of lava which flowed from that mountain, according to his opinion, in the time of the second Punic war, or about two thousand years ago; this stratum is not yet covered with soil sufficient for the production of either corn or vines; it requires then, says the Canon, two thousand years at least to convert a stratum of lava into a fertile field. In sinking a pit near *Jaci*, in the neighbourhood of Etna, they have discovered evident marks of seven distinct lavas one under the other; the surfaces of which are parallel, and most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth: now, the eruption which formed the lowest of these lavas (if we may be

* Brydone's Travels.

allowed to reason, says the Canon, from analogy) flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago.—It might be briefly answered to this objection, by denying that there is any thing in the history of Moses repugnant to this opinion concerning the great antiquity of the earth; for though the rise and progress of arts and sciences, and the small multiplication of the human species, render it almost to a demonstration probable, that man has not existed longer upon the surface of this earth than according to the Mosaic account; yet that the earth itself was then created out of nothing, when man was placed upon it, is not, according to the sentiments of some philosophers, to be proved from the original text of sacred Scripture: we might, I say, reply with these philosophers to this formidable objection of the Canon, by granting it in its full extent; we are under no necessity, however, of adopting their opinion in order to shew the weakness of the Canon's reasoning. For, in the first place, the Canon has not satisfactorily established his main fact, that the lava in question is the identical lava which Diodorus Siculus mentions to have flowed from Etna, in the second Carthaginian war; and, in the second place it may be

observed, that the time necessary for converting lavas into fertile fields must be very different, according to the different consistencies of the lavas, and their different situations, with respect to elevation or depression; to their being exposed to winds, rains, and to other circumstances; just as the time in which the heaps of iron slag (which resembles lava) are covered with verdure, is different at different furnaces according to the nature of the slag, and situation of the furnace; and something of this kind is deducible from the account of the Canon himself; since the crevices of this famous stratum are really full of rich, good soil, and have pretty large trees growing in them.

But if all this should be thought not sufficient to remove the objection, I will produce the Canon an analogy in opposition to his analogy, and which is grounded on more certain facts. Etna and Vesuvius resemble each other, in the causes which produce their eruptions, and in the nature of their lavas, and in the time necessary to mellow them into soil fit for vegetation; or if there be any slight difference in this respect, it is probably not greater than what subsists between different lavas of the same mountain. This

being admitted, which no philosopher will deny, the Canon's analogy will prove just nothing at all, if we can produce an instance of seven different lavas (with interjacent strata of vegetable earth) which have flowed from Mount Vesuvius, within the space, not of fourteen thousand, but of somewhat less than seventeen hundred years; for then, according to our analogy, a stratum of lava may be covered with vegetable soil in about two hundred and fifty years, instead of requiring two thousand for the purpose. The eruption of Vesuvius, which destroyed Herculaneum and Pompeii, is rendered still more famous by the death of Pliny, recorded by his nephew in his letter to Tacitus; this event happened in the year 79; it is not yet then quite seventeen hundred years since Herculaneum was swallowed up; but we are informed by unquestionable authority, that "the matter which covers the ancient town of Herculaneum is not the produce of one eruption only; for there are evident marks, that the matter of six eruptions has taken its course over that which lies immediately above the town, and was the cause of its destruction. These strata are either of lava or burnt matter, *with veins of good soil betwixt*

*them**."—I will not add another word upon this subject; except that the bishop of the diocese was not much out in his advice to Canonico Recupero—to take care not to make his mountain older than Moses; though it would have been full as well to have shut his mouth with a reason, as to have stopped it with the dread of an ecclesiastical censure.

You perceive with what ease a little attention will remove a great difficulty; but had we been able to say nothing in explanation of this phænomenon, we should not have acted a very rational part in making our ignorance the foundation of our infidelity, or suffering a minute philosopher to rob us of our religion.

Your objections to revelation may be numerous; you may find fault with the account which Moses has given of the Creation and the Fall; you may not be able to get water enough for an universal deluge; nor room enough in the ark of Noah for all the different kinds of aerial and ter-

* See Sir William Hamilton's Remarks upon the Nature of the Soil of Naples and its neighbourhood, in the Philos. Trans. vol. lxi. p. 7.

restrial animals; you may be dissatisfied with the command for sacrificing of Isaac, for plundering the Egyptians, and for extirpating the Canaanites; you may find fault with the Jewish economy, for its ceremonies, its sacrifices, and its multiplicity of priests; you may object to the imprecations in the Psalms, and think the immoralities of David a fit subject for dramatic ridicule*; you may look upon the partial promulgation of Christianity as an insuperable objection to its truth, and waywardly reject the goodness of God toward yourselves, because you do not comprehend how you have deserved it more than others; you may know nothing of the entrance of sin and death into the world by one man's transgression; nor be able to comprehend the doctrine of the cross and of redemption by Jesus Christ; in short, if your mind is so disposed, you may find food for your scepticism in every page of the Bible, as well as in every appearance of nature; and it is not in the power of any person, but yourselves, to clear up your doubts; you must read, and you must

* See Saül et David Hyperdrame.

Whatever censure the author of this composition may deserve for his intention, the work itself deserves none; its ridicule is too gross to mislead even the ignorant.

think for yourselves; and you must do both with temper, with candour, and with care. Infidelity is a rank weed; it is nurtured by our vices, and cannot be plucked up as easily as it may be planted: your difficulties with respect to revelation may have first arisen from your own reflections on the religious indifference of those, whom, from your earliest infancy, you have been accustomed to revere and imitate; domestic irreligion may have made you a willing hearer of libertine conversation; and the uniform prejudices of the world may have finished the business, at a very early age, and left you to wander through life, without a principle to direct your conduct, and to die without hope. We are far from wishing you to trust the word of the Clergy for the truth of your religion; we beg of you to examine it to the bottom, to try it, to prove it, and not to hold it fast unless you find it good. Till you are disposed to undertake this task, it becomes you to consider with great seriousness and attention, whether it can be for your interest to esteem a few witty sarcasms, or metaphysic subtleties, or ignorant misrepresentations, or unwarranted assertions, as unanswerable arguments against revelation; and a very slight reflection will con-

vince you, that it will certainly be for your reputation to employ the flippancy of your rhetoric, and the poignancy of your ridicule, upon any subject rather than upon the subject of Religion.

I take my leave with recommending to your notice, the advice which Mr. Locke gave to a young man who was desirous of becoming acquainted with the doctrines of the Christian religion.—" Study the holy Scriptures, especially the New Testament: therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter*."

I am, &c.

* Locke's Posth. Works.

AN APOLOGY

FOR

THE BIBLE,

IN

A SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

THOMAS PAINE,

AUTHOR OF A BOOK ENTITLED, "THE AGE OF REASON, PART THE SECOND, BEING AN INVESTIGATION OF TRUE AND OF FABULOUS THEOLOGY."

Tenth Edition.

M

LETTER I.

SIR,

I HAVE lately met with a book of yours, entitled—" THE AGE OF REASON, part the second, being an investigation of true and of fabulous theology;"—and I think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it; not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed religion, (for I find little or no novelty in them,) but from the zeal with which you labour to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive, by this, that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner on such a subject: and I have no reluctance in acknowledging that you possess a considerable

share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation; though I must be allowed to lament, that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself.

I begin with your preface. You therein state —that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life. —I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurance of a future recompence; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness, usually and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupted morals.

No one can think worse of confession to a priest and subsequent absolution, as practised in the church of Rome, than I do; but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine-massacres to that cause. Men's minds were not prepared, as you suppose, for the commission of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the church of Rome, corrupted as I esteem it, but by their not thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not society expect from those who shall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you and those about you expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you had written the former part of your Age of Reason—and you know therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us on all occasions, what is right or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or tur-

pitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible sense. Now who sees not that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature?—may be certain, or doubtful?—and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or of an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience; but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his

conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor who burns Jews and heretics: a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty; —these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember "with renewed satisfaction" the worst of their transactions, and experience, without dismay, "a conscientious trial of their principles." But this their conscientious composure can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence, in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance—whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established?—You will allow that thousands of learned and impartial

men, (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents,)—you will allow that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me—"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth."—I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know indeed where it is said—"that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, —and that if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them

that are lost." The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of Him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this and the following letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of infidelity: they will excuse me, therefore, for having entered, as little as possible, into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly, and so frequently handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any farther proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of

credit. I hope to shew, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should suspect that all ancient authors are in your favour; I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, Christian, Jewish, or Pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established, the credit and authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself; in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is—"Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the Word of God, or whether there is not?"—You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible that the Bible can be the Word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God:

and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of God; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend?—I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess that from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites.—Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by a fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence? The Word of God is in perfect harmony with his work; cry-

ing or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive—why do you not spurn, as spurious, the book of nature, in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God? You will, probably, reply, that the evils which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which are brought on mankind by the operation of the laws of nature.—Different! in what?—Not in the magnitude of the evil—not in the subjects of sufferance—not in the author of it—for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe, that God not only primarily formed, but that he hath, through all ages, executed, the laws of nature; and that he will, through all eternity, administer them, for the general happiness of his creatures,

whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion; what I contend for is shortly this—that you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it, as an argument against natural religion: you reject the former, and admit the latter, without considering that, as to your objection, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moses, they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants; devourers of human flesh; addicted to unnatural lust; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice. Now, I think, it will be impos-

sible to prove, that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance; and, in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination of vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations—that the land spew not you out also, as it spewed out the nations that were before you." How strong and descriptive this language! the vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

I have often wondered what could be the reason that men, not destitute of talents, should be desirous of undermining the authority of revealed religion, and studious in exposing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the Scriptures, to popular animadversion and contempt. I am not willing to

attribute this strange propensity to what Plato attributed the atheism of his time—to profligacy of manners—to affectation of singularity—to gross ignorance, assuming the semblance of deep research and superior sagacity;—I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment, respecting the manners, and mental acquirements, of human kind in the first ages of the world. Most unbelievers argue as if they thought that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one, eternal, invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful, and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by a long experience; by the institutions of civil society; by the cultivation of arts and sciences; by, as I believe, divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all; is in a far more distinguished situation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man is the history of the providence of God; who, willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those, who in different ages were the

subjects of it. The history of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan, which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immense design? The shortness of life, the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us, worms of the earth! insects of an hour! completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of ancient times many things should occur foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents; that he should have contracted a kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt; should have been so apparently partial as to become the God and governor of one particular nation; and should have so far demeaned

himself as to give to that people a burthensome ritual of worship, statutes and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant and impolitic. I have conversed with many deists, and have always found that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them: nothing similar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore, admit, that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood, contend that he had never either stood in need or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world; nursed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation; communicated to that nation a knowledge of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom; disseminated them at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world, the only proper object of adoration. With

what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? that the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age? I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence; and when I contemplate his miserable attainments as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten, (for all men have known something of God from tradition,) I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions; in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the Jewish and Christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he had vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself

in the first ages of the world; but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here—that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire—that there is a sun, and moon, and stars—that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for none of these things, without recurring to him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend, but his word hath assured me of all that I am concerned to know—that he hath prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment:—I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of Providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration, and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth forfeits with me

all claim to candour and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me; but examine what you shall produce, with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, not liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

LETTER II.

Before you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not surprised at your anxiety on this head; for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking that St. Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked—"What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose names they bear; unless it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since these authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence which established the genuineness of any profane book would establish that of a sacred book, and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony. —You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements.—If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say that even Euclid's Elements had not met with universal consent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations: but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true.——What then? Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false? The most illiterate scrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic, are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII. or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use to remove this confusion in your argument to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity, of a book. A genuine book, is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book, is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine, without being authentic; and a book may be authentic, without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding are genuine books, though the histories of Clarissa and Tom Jones are fables. The history of the island of Formosa is a genuine book; it was written by Psalmanazar: but it is not an authentic book, (though it was long esteemed as such, and translated into different languages,) for the author, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. Anson's Voyage may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principal events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by Walter, to whom it is ascribed, but by Robins.

This distinction between the genuineness and

authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your argument stands thus—If it be found that the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, were not written by Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once.—I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of these books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, Moses said that he wrote the first five books of the Bible; and had Joshua and Samuel said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them; and had it been found, that Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, did not write these books; then, I grant, the authority

of the whole would have been gone at once; these men would have been found liars, as to the genuineness of the books; and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their testimony in every other; these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

An history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had Lord Clarendon published his History of the Rebellion, without prefixing his name to it; or had the history of Titus Livius come down to us, under the name of Valerius Flaccus, or Valerius Maximus; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible —it, being a mere assertion destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence

for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour, the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but lest that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said, that their *Apollonius*, their *Apuleius*, their *Aristeas*, did as great: whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding; they are sensible that the gospel miracles are so different in all their circumstances, from those related in Pagan story, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a

kind of deistical axiom—that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle. —This, though it has been an hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You "proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to shew that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death of Moses."—In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been heard of, either in the synagogue, or out

of it, till the twelfth century. About that time *Eben Ezra*, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the five first books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. *Hobbes* contends that the books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. *Spinoza* supported the same opinion; and *Le Clerc*, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not exclusively yours. *Le Clerc*, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis, a Latin dis-

sertation—concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honour to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of *Le Clerc*. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine, and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained that the history of *Herodotus* was written in the time of *Constantine*; and that the classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not venture to predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objection to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert —"That there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them."—What? no affirmative evidence! In the eleventh century *Maimonides* drew up a confession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day admit; it consists of

only thirteen articles; and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books.—The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true—The law that we have was given by Moses.—This is the faith of the Jews at present, and has been their faith ever since the destruction of their city and temple; it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Testament wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be shewn, from the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was not their faith.—Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot desire a stronger. *Josephus*, in his book against *Appion*, writes thus—"We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man, and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years." Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence? Why should I mention *Juvenal* speaking of the volume which Moses had written? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing

testimony to the fact of *Moses* being the leader and the law-giver of the Jewish nation? and if a law-giver, surely a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible? In Exodus it says—"Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people."—In Deuteronomy it says—"And, it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, (this surely imports the finishing a laborious work,) that Moses commanded the Levites which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, 'Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee'." This is said in Deuteronomy, which is a kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books; and it is well known that the Jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the Scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses's

being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I should grant all you undertake to prove (the stupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted?—) What if I should admit, that *Samuel*, or *Ezra*, or some other learned Jew, composed these books, from public records, many years after the death of Moses! Will it follow, that there was no truth in them? According to my logic, it will only follow, that they are not genuine books; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever, or by whomsoever they were written. It cannot be said that the Jews had no public records, the Bible furnishes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit, that these books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moses; but I do contend, that a book may contain a true history, though we know not the author of it, or though we may be mistaken in ascribing it to a wrong author.

The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old that I do not know its original author; and it is so miserable an one, that I wonder you should

adopt it—" These books cannot be written by Moses, because they are written in the third person—it is always, The Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord. This, you say, is the style and manner that historians use in speaking of the persons whose lives and actions they are writing." This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough; for this is the style and manner not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as *Xenophon* and *Josephus*, writing of themselves. If General *Washington* should write the history of the American war, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, would you think it reasonable that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should, on that account, contend, that the history was not true? *Cæsar* writes of himself in the third person —it is always, Cæsar made a speech, or a speech was made to Cæsar; Cæsar crossed the Rhine; Cæsar invaded Britain; but every schoolboy knows that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against Cæsar's being the author of his own Commentaries.

But Moses, you urge, cannot be the author of

the book of Numbers,—because, he says of himself—"that Moses was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, you say, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb, (such is your phrase!) and unworthy of credit—and if he did not say it, the *books* are without authority." This your dilemma is perfectly harmless; it has not an horn to hurt the weakest logician. If Moses did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by Samuel, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner, it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who, being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride, and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying, My temper was

naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness; and in that predicament stood *Aaron* and *Miriam*, the accusers of Moses. You yourself have, probably, felt the stings of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, and I hope truly, "that the man does not exist that can say, I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution, or in the French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this; you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you any harm; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy; it is an ill-founded hypothesis. You might as well ask where the author of Cæsar's Commentaries got the speeches of Cæsar, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the speeches of Moses. But your argument—that Moses was not the author of Deuteronomy, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the sabbath, is different from that given in Exodus, merits a reply.

You need not be told that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law;" but the Hebrew words more properly translated, import that Moses "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by *Fagius*, *Vetablus*, and *Le Clerc*, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law, was a wise and benevolent proceed-

ing in Moses; that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it; especially as Moses their leader was soon to be taken from them, and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry, and sunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions, should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation?

With respect to the sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin; some contending that it was sanctified from the creation of the world; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the Flood; that it was neglected by the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt, revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness, and enjoined, as a positive law, at Mount Sinai. Others esteem its institution to have been no older than the age of Moses; and argue, that what is said of the sanctification of the sabbath in the book of Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable, that the memory

of the Creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity; and that the seventh day was, for a long time, held sacred by all nations, in commemoration of that event; but that the peculiar rigidness of its observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to there being two reasons given for its being kept holy,—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, that on that day, God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers, that the parliament had ordered the fifth of November to be kept holy, because on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody intended massacre by gunpowder; and if, in another part of his history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude, that he was not the author of them both?

You think—"that law in Deuteronomy inhu-

man and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness."—You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power, amongst the *Romans*, the *Gauls*, the *Persians*, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate—the father and the mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment—and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accu-

sation was to be not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was "stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard." Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been an humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject—"Priests, you say, preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tithes."—I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy, more than they preach up other books of Scripture; but I do know that tithes are not preached up in Deuteronomy, more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation.—You go on—"It is from this book, chap. xxv. ver. 4, they have taken the phrase, and applied it to tithing, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn;" and that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. "O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the sake of tithes!"—I cannot call this—rea-

soning—and I will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying—the ox is not to be muzzled—said—tithes enjoined, or priests to be maintained—there would have been a little ground for your censure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter, had better reason for doing it than you have attributed to them. They did it because St. Paul had quoted it when he was proving to the Corinthians, that they who preached the gospel had a right to live by the gospel; it was Paul, and not the priests who first applied this phrase to tithing. St. Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for; he was not, therefore, interested in what he said. The reason on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation, which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise; no, it is a reason founded in the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason; it amounts to this—that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." Nothing is so much a man's own, as his labour and ingenuity: and it is entirely

consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labour and talents for a stipulated reward; why may not a priest do the same? Some accounts of you have been published in England; but conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition in life. You may have been elevated, by your birth, above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the labour either of hand or head; if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have come into the world in less favourable circumstances. If your origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself, either by manual labour, or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I know not whether you have as great a dislike of kings as of priests; but that you may be induced to think more favourably of men of my profession, I will just mention to you that the payment of tithes is no new institution, but that they were paid in

the most ancient times, not to priests only, but to kings. I could give you an hundred instances of this: two may be sufficient, *Abraham* paid tithes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation, for kings were priests, long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But as this instance is taken from a book which you call "a book of contradictions and lies"—the Bible;—I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. *Diogenes Laertius*, in his life of *Solon*, cites a letter of *Pisistratus* to that law-giver, in which he says—"I Pisistratus, the tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me; the people of Athens set apart a *tenth* of the fruits of their land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good."

LETTER III.

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence; and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word—Dan—being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laish was not called Dan, till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses: therefore the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given to it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate it in the following manner: "Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written

till after the year 1793." This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some hot republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-Grace should write Havre-Marat; and that, two or three thousand years hence, a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him—that the name Havre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges. I desire, further, to have it proved, that the Dan mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town, and not of a river. It is merely said—Abraham pursued them, the enemies of Lot, to Dan. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. *Lot*, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan*; and Jordan,

we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects its being said in Genesis—"These are the kings that reigned in Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel;—this passage could only have been written, you say (and I think you say rightly), after the first king began to reign over Israel; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making the concession which I have made; but I have no scruple in admitting, that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses containing the genealogy of some kings of Edom, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis, after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shewn, that interpolations have happened to other books; but

these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of those books.

"Take away from Genesis," you say, "the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the Word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies."—What! is it a story then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God? If you deem this a story, I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. It is a story, that our first parents fell from a paradisaical state—that this earth was destroyed by a deluge—that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark—and that the world has been repeopled by his descendants?—Look into a book so common that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the Christian religion—and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians, and priests; it is the testi-

mony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis; and it is remarkable that those books which come nearest to it in age, are those which make, either the most distinct mention of, or the most evident allusion to, the facts related in Genesis concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world, the depravity of the antediluvians, and the destruction of the world. —Read the tenth chapter of Genesis.—It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narration of the descendants of *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth;* a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No, Sir, it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then indeed it would have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead

of these absurdities, it gives such an account of the peopling the earth after the deluge, as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which all other books in the world, which contain any thing on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says—"These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out, precisely, either the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders of empires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges; so much at least to my satisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the *Assyrians*, the *Elamites*, the *Lydians*, the *Medes*, the *Ionians*, the *Thracians*, will readily acknowledge that they had *Assur*, and *Elam*, and *Lud*, and *Madai*, and *Javan*, and *Tiros*, grandsons of *Noah*, for their respective founders; and knowing this, he will not, I hope,

part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it, as Cicero said of the twelve tables,—This little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible, you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light!) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason that God should, by an express act of his providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am persuaded that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin; are calculated to lessen its influence; and are proofs of his goodness; inasmuch as it may not

be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin; it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone; but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry; to the impure worship of their infamous god Baalpeor:—for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven, and Moses received a command from God "to smite the Midianites who had beguiled the people." An army was equipped, and sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation went to meet it; "and Moses was wroth

with the officers." He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, "Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation." He then gave an order that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding, but good policy, combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of, what they would esteem, their country's wrongs; the mothers might have again allured the Israelites to the love of licentious pleasures and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter; you say—"that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses."—Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him—prove this, and I will allow that the Bible

is what you call it—"a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy."—Prove this, or excuse my warmth if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, "O full of all subtilty, and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"—I did not, when I began these letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery; a custom abhorrent from our manners, but every where practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible respecting the expedition against Midian to be a true account; it is not unreasonable to desire that you will admit the whole, or shew sufficient reason why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish

army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian; yet, when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not lost a single man! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God's interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls." Do but believe what the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, believed at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objection to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moses.

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible.—I cannot stop to notice them: every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate, to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of *Og* the king of Basan; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the body, or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed; nor ever

suspect that king Og might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give to the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it; but you speak of it in such a manner as gives room to believe, that you are a great proficient in it; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc.* The problem is this—To determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight.—When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Basan was too big for any giant; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things; but it does not teach me to reject

every testimony which is opposite to my experience: had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.

LETTER IV.

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the book of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua; and from its internal evidence you endeavour to prove, that this book was not written by Joshua.—What then? what is your conclusion?—"that it is anonymous and without authority."—Stop a little; your conclusion is not connected with your premises; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. "Anonymous, and therefore without authority!" I have noticed this solecism before; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation upon the subject. The book called Fleta is anonymous; but it is not on that account without authority.—Doomsday book is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago; yet our courts of law do not hold

it to be without authority, as to the matters of fact related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care? Josephus says the contrary; and, in the Bible itself, an appeal is made to many books, which have perished; such as the book of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history of Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one having access to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treasury, war-office, privy-council, and other public documents, should at this day write an history of the reigns of George the First and Second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book, from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received

as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Dodsley's Annual Register is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity, esteem these books as of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after-ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "It is anonymous and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning, (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it,) all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward: these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing that there is no such positive proof, when or by whom these, and some other books of Holy Scripture, were written, as to exclude all possi-

bility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this æra by many hundred years? It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact: a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, had been preserved among one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his Euterpe, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says —"They told me that the sun four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where

he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This however had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt, the fruits of the earth and the phænomena of the Nile had always been the same." (Beloe's Transl.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in Scripture; for they were not of that kind, which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery;—you may have seen some Jewish doctors and some Christian commentators, who consider it as such; but improperly in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are

still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says—"Is this not written in the book of Jasher?"—No author in his senses would have appealed in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact, which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely therefore conclude that, at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun's having stood still; I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, and that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been upon ours, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said that—" Joshua burned Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto *this day*." Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai: and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying, Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? A young man who had seen the heads of the rebels, in forty-five, when they were first stuck upon poles at Temple Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity in speaking of the fact have justly said—And they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the gospel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of one century after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the Potter's field which had been purchased by the chief priests with the money they had given Judas to betray his master, says, that it was therefore called the field of blood *unto this day;* and in another place he says, that the story of the body of Jesus being stolen out of the sepulchre was commonly reported among the Jews *until this day*. Moses, in his old age, had made

use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea, "The Lord hath destroyed them unto this day." (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related, that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem; and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham to that time, when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them —"Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered that "they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have cho-

sen you the Lord to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua, on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel, on their own part.—The text then says—" So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Sechem, *and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God.*" Here is a proof of two things—first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called The book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them—secondly, that Joshua *wrote* a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death, have been inserted in it by

others, in order to render the history more complete.

The book of Joshua, chap. vi. ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. xvi. ver. 44. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings; but that is not all which may be reasonably inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. —It may be inferred from the phrase—according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun—that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase —as thou spakest by thy servant Moses in the day when thou didst command him *to write thy law.*

I think it unnecessary to make any observations on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your cen-

sure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping slily to bed to her cousin Boaz; pretty stuff, indeed," you exclaim, "to be called the word of God!"—It seems to me that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression—the word of God—or the divine authority of the Scriptures:—I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St. Austin. My first quotation is from bishop Law's Theory of Religion, a book not undeserving your notice.—"The true sense then of the *divine authority* of the books of the Old Testament, and which, perhaps, is enough to denominate them in general *divinely inspired*, seems to be this; that as in those times God has all along, beside the inspection, or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called *prophets*) to declare his will in various manners, and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject; and in all other cases, left them wholly to themselves: in like manner, he has interposed his more immediate assistance, and no-

tified it to them, as they did to the world,) in the *recording* of these revelations; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common, (but from hence termed *sacred*) history of those times; and mixed with various other occurrences; in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things, with all the accuracy they required."—The passage from St. Austin is this—"I am of opinion, that those men, to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inspiration; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion." Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire; it is the opinion of many learned men and good Christians; and if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself; you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors—apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts—needless repetitions and trifling

interpolations—indeed you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be absolutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed by upright and well informed, though, in some points, fallible men, (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the word of God,) and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to other historians; believe them to deliver the word of God, when they tell you that they do so; believe when they relate other things as of themselves, and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity; and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist: you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible; though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God, assisting a

teachable disposition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country, out of which with her husband and her two sons she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America; if, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl?—But she "crept slily to bed to her cousin Boaz."—I do not find it so in the history—as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman's bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down; she was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbours a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient man-

ners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman following, in a strange land, the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes, of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to shew that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble, if you had recollected, that it is generally admitted, that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the several books of the Bible; you would have found, that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little certainty, I think, can at this time be obtained on

this subject; but that you may have some knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr. Hartley's Observations on Man. The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observation, for he begins it with a supposition. ——" I suppose then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of *Moses*, put together by *Samuel*, with a very few additions; that the books of Joshua and Judges were, in like manner, collected by him; and the book of Ruth, with the first part of the first book of Samuel, written by him; that the latter part of the first book of Samuel, and the second book were written by the prophets who succeeded Samuel, suppose *Nathan* and *Gad;* that the book of Kings and Chronicles are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets, concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables, made by *Ezra;* that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are collections of like records, some written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and some by their predecessors; that the book of Esther was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transaction there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai;* the book of Job by a Jew, of an uncertain time;

the Psalms by *David*, and other pious persons; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by *Solomon;* the book of Ecclesiastes by *Solomon*, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author; the prophecies by the prophets whose names they bear; and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed."———I have produced this passage to you, not merely to shew you that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending; but to convince you that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for such was Dr. Hartley, and no priest, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself with any more observations on that head; you may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please; I am satisfied with knowing that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and, probably, in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times in which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not

only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places—"Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." 1 Chron. xxix. 29.—"Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?" 2 Chron. ix. 29.—"Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chron. xii. 15.—"Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani," 2 Chron. xx. 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history?

"The two books of Kings," you say, "are little more than an history of assassinations, treachery, and war." That the kings of Israel and

Judah were many of them very wicked persons, is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible; but it ought to be remembered that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion; nor were the people of Israel chosen to be the people of God, on account of their wickedness; nor was their being chosen, a cause of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced so many singular marks of God's goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be, (what, however, they have long been,) strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God, the Maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three and twenty hundred years the Jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon "the appellation of the Jews being God's *chosen* people as a *lie*, which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have professed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is

no *lie*, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the universality of things, and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its surface, will not appear (exclusive of the divinity of their souls) of more importance than an hillock of ants; all of which, some with corn, some with eggs, some without any thing, run hither and thither, bustling about a little heap of dust.—This is a thought of the immortal Bacon; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philosophy, attempting to prescribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes of God. We may as easily circumscribe infinity, as penetrate the secret purposes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the nature of the Supreme Being,—by reason, and by revelation; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now my reason informs me, that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with respect to their capacity of enjoying happiness. Every kind is perfect in its order; but if we compare different kinds together, one will ap-

pear to be greatly superior to another. An animal, which has but one sense, has but one source of happiness; but if it be supplied with what is suited to that sense, it enjoys all the happiness of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other sorts of animals, which have two or three senses, and which have also abundant means of gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much happiness as those do which have but one. In the same sort of animals there is a great difference amongst individuals, one having the senses more perfect, and the body less subject to disease, than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the divine goodness by this use of my reason, I could not but say that it was partial and unequal.—"What shall we say then? Is God unjust? God forbid!" His goodness may be unequal, without being imperfect; it must be estimated from the whole, and not from a part. Every order of beings is so sufficient for its own happiness, and so conducive at the same time to the happiness of every other, that in one view it seems to be made for itself alone, and in another not for itself but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immense fabric which God hath formed, I am persuaded, that

we should see nothing but perfection, harmony, and beauty, in every part of it; but whilst we dispute about parts, we neglect the whole, and discern nothing but supposed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ship, is not to be blamed because a spectator cannot discover either the beauty or the use of disjointed parts. And shall we dare to accuse God of injustice, for not having distributed the gifts of nature in the same degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of distribution may be the means of producing the greatest sum total of happiness to the whole system? In exactly the same manner may we reason concerning the acts of God's especial providence. If we consider any one act, such as that of appointing the Jews to be his peculiar people, as unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial display of his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning the wisdom or the benignity of his divine nature. But if we connect the history of the Jews with that of other nations, from the most remote antiquity to the present time, we shall discover that they were not chosen so much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general

benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are still to all civilized nations, a beacon set upon an hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the sanctuary of a God holy, just, and good. Why should we suspect such a dispensation of being a *lie?* when even from the little which we can understand of it, we see that it is founded in wisdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reason teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several things you observe are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man;—these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of veracity in another who mentions it. And this observation is still more cogent, when applied to

a book which is only a supplement to, or an abridgment of, other books: and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam? The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings xiii. 2.—"Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places."—Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. Above 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings, (chap. xxiii. 15, 16.) this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation that Genesis was not written till 800 years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think of the same authority, as Æsop's Fables. You give what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration—"It has but two stages:—first,

the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles, and therefore the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles;—secondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, 588 years before Christ, and more than 860 years after Moses."—Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it; but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will shew you its weakness, when it is properly stated.—A *few verses* in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses:—*therefore no part* of Genesis could be written by Moses;—a child would deny your *therefore*.—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by *Moses*, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses; and *therefore* they could not be written by *Samuel*, or by *Solomon*, or by any other person who lived after there were kings in Israel, except by the author of the book of Chronicles;—this is also an illegitimate inference from your position.—Again, a few verses in the book of Genesis are, word for word, the same

as a few verses in the book of Chronicles;—*therefore* the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from Chronicles;—another lame conclusion! Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel, or any other person have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject.

LETTER V.

At length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about 536 years before Christ: but then you say, "Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the Word of God in those books as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin's History of England." Here let us stop a moment, and try if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books—"but they are nothing to us!"—The very first verse of Ezra says—the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled:—is it nothing to us to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men

a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to that very time?—Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the Jews is true?—It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are branches "graffed in amongst them;" to them pertain "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt, some difficulties in it; but a minute philosopher, who busies himself in searching them

out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design, and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvas and the colouring. The history of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances of the world, that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, blasphemies: I look upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever were attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truths respecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind,

is highly useful; but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying, that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they bring us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space; of the eternity of duration; of necessary existence; of the connection between necessary existence and intelligence, between intelligence and benevolence; you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter; or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity; you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error!

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance; it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith? Was it no lesson to him to obey, in all things, the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquests to the Author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance; you ought to have known, that this rite was an indication of reverence for the divine presence; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book; but that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say, that in matters of record it is not to be depended on; and as a proof of your assertion, you tell us that the total amount

of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars, and shew your own skill in arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum total of sixty particular sums? You know, undoubtedly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there was such a great similarity between some of these letters, that it was extremely easy for a transcriber of a manuscript to mistake a ב for a כ (or 2 for 20), a ג for a נ (or 3 for 50), a ד for ר (or 4 for 200). Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error—the inattention of the transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it?

I should extend those letters to a length troublesome to the reader, to you, and to myself, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be sufficient briefly to notice

some of the chief. The character represented in Job under the name of Satan is, you say, "the first and the only time this name is mentioned in the Bible." Now I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament; thus 2 Sam. xix. 22. "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be adversaries unto me?" In the original it is satans unto me. Again, 1 Kings v. 4. "The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary, nor evil occurrent"—in the original, neither satan nor evil. I need not mention other places; these are sufficient to shew, that the word satan, denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root satan was introduced into the Hebrew and other eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word satan is not older than the Babylonian captivity; this is a mistake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth Psalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity. Now we are upon this subject, permit me to re-

commend to your consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who in the beginning of time had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself, to the supreme source of all good. Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant—hence the Egyptian *Typho* and *Osiris*—the Persian *Arimanius* and *Oromasdes*—the Grecian *celestial* and *infernal Jove*—the *Brama* and the *Zupay* of the Indians, Peruvians, Mexicans—the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations—and hence the structure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light, of history or drama, it be considered. Now does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and so universal has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

The Jews, you tell us, "never prayed but when they were in trouble." I do not believe

this of the Jews; but that they prayed more fervently when they were in trouble than at other times, may be true of the Jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and all individuals. But "the Jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches."—Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion,—illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

It appears, you observe, "to have been the custom of the heathens to personify both virtue and vice, by statues and images, as is done now-a-days both by statuary and by paintings; but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do." Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up?—Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshipped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshipped them! "What man is there that

knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Not worshipped them!—The worship was universal. "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places, which the Samaritans had made; the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech, and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this your curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved *Micah's teraphims*, the *golden calves of Jeroboam, and of Aaron*, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment!!! Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute,

seems to have had some foundation for his improper humour, some knowledge that certain men esteeming themselves great philosophers had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms—the Psalms of David—This error was observed by St. Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words are—"We know that they are in an error who attribute all the Psalms to David."—You, I suppose, will not deny, that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs;—if you will have the "Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different Song-writers," you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordinary spirit; that this is a collection, incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the

choruses of the Greek tragedians, (no contemptible compositions any of these,) and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all, in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David a song-book, it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jest-book; there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests; if we had the whole three thousand, which he wrote, our mirth would be extreme. Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains; take the very first as a specimen—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction."—Do you perceive any jest in this? The fear of the Lord! What Lord does Solomon mean? He means that Lord who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people—who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interposition of his power—who gave the law to Moses—who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan.—Now this Lord you will not fear; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction.—Let us try again—

"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."—If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings, you will see no jest in this.—Once more—"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's "jest-book;" if you read it through, it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wise; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom—the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jesters are sometimes witty; but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr. Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. Solomon "was wiser than Ethan the Ezahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol."—These men you may think were jesters; and so you may call the seven wise men of Greece: but you will never convince the world that Solomon, who was wiser than them all, was nothing but a witty jester. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and

to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious—the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that, unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book, (a few historical sketches excepted) "as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning," you must of necessity allow its divine authority. You compare the burden of Babylon, the burden of Moab, the burden of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to the "story of the knight of the burning mountain, the story of Cinderilla, &c." I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah's burden of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe that

the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are by man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burden of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth, and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least an hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead:—these chapters, you go on, "are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity above one hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah:"—and is it for this, sir, that you accuse the church of audacity and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an historical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet?—We contend, sir, that this is a prophecy and not a his-

tory; that God called *Cyrus* by his name; declared that he should conquer Babylon; and described the means by which he should do it, above one hundred years before Cyrus was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. *Porphyry* could not resist the evidence of *Daniel*'s prophecies, but by saying, that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; *Voltaire* could not resist the evidence of the prediction of *Jesus*, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed; and you, at length, (though for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption,) unable to resist the evidence of *Isaiah*'s prophecies, contend that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of them is not a prophecy, but an historical compliment written after the event. We will not, sir, give up Daniel and St. Matthew to the impudent assertions of Porphyry and Voltaire, nor will we give up Isaiah to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not assertion: we will not re-

linquish our religion, in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider that Cyrus was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two independent Beings, equal in power but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now is it probable that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince that his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none else; I form the *light* and create *darkness*, I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruse the burden of Babylon; was that also written after the event? Were the Medes *then* stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, *then* overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it *then* uninhabited?

Was it *then* neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert *then* lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands *then* cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the son and the grandson, *then* cut off? Was Babylon *then* become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it *then* swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not now where to find it?

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness, to you, or to any man; I cannot avoid believing, that you think you have truth on your side, and that you are doing service to mankind in endeavouring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this—that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reason; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up from the writings of others; and without taking any notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce

them as if they were new. There is certainly some novelty, at least in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion, and in profaneness of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you, what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavours to search out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would, in the first place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, goodness; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible, (for the destruction of the Canaanites by his express command, I have shewn not to be repugnant to his moral justice,) he would, in the second place, consider that the Bible being, as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by various authors, and at different and distant periods, there might, pro-

bably, occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it; he would endeavour to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this concession, from observing, that there ran through the whole book an harmony and connection, utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe, that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed, that they could not be separated; that they must either both be true, or both false; and from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies; well knowing that the pre-

diction of things to come, was as certain a proof of the divine interposition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circumstances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day, he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of this accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion.—To return.—

As to your observation, that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste, which is properly called prose run mad—I have only to remark, that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from translation, would be more correct if you would suffer yourself to be informed on the subject by Bishop Lowth, who tells you in his *Prelections* —"that a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification,

much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification." (Gregory's Transl.) If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew of the prophecy in Isaiah—"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one: I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce—that Isaiah was "a lying prophet and an impostor." Now I maintain, that this very instance proves, that he was a true prophet, and no impostor. The history of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this—Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz king of Judah; not merely, or perhaps, not at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing

another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed—"Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal."—Now what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? Did he commission him to say, The kings shall not vex thee? No.—The kings shall not conquer thee? No.—The kings shall not succeed against thee? No:—he commissioned him to say, "It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." I demand—Did it stand, did it come to pass? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal house of David dethroned and destroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say, "Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed."—I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but not destroyed; and even the "two hundred thousand women, and sons, and daughters," whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity: they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity: for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah

to bring the captives into the land—"They rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israelites, whom you every where represent as barbarous brutes), and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren." 2 Chron. xxviii. 15.—The kings did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution, they did not destroy the house of David, for Ahaz slept with his fathers; and Hezekiah, his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.

LETTER VI.

After what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection which Spinoza and others before you had much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness, nor the authenticity, of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of a bookbinder, in misplacing the sheets of your performance, would lessen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah has been put together in a disordered state. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not every where observed; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to *Baruch* collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places:—others think that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that through accident, or the carelessness of transcribers, they

were deranged:—others contend, that there is no confusion; that prophecy differs from history, in not being subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater importance—to your charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction. First, as to his duplicity:

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who sought his life; there he would have perished, had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favour, saying, "These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, (no small testimony this, of the probity of the prophet's character,) whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger."—On this representation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him, and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself, by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his pro-

phecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath, to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded."—Thus, you remark, "this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate; for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he make it."—It is not said that he told the princes he *went* to make his supplication, but that he *presented* it: now it is said in the preceding

chapter, that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it; but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature, or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certainly his enemies, and no good subjects to his king. "In a matter (says Puffendorf) which I am not *obliged* to declare to another, if I cannot, with safety, conceal the whole, I may fairly discover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any *obligation* to declare to the princes what had passed in his conference with the king? You may as well say, that the house of lords has a right to compel privy counsellors to reveal the king's secrets. The king cannot justly require a privy counsellor to tell a lie for him; but he may require him not to divulge his *counsels* to those who have no right to know them.—Now for the false prediction—I will give the description of it in your own words.

"In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jere-

miah to Zedekiah, in these words, ver. 2 :—'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. *Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, King of Judah; thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah, lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.*'

"Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burnings of odours, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced) the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, 'That the King of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; that he put out

the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.' What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?" I can say this—that the prophecy you have produced, was fulfilled in all its parts; and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue—you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. "I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.)—"Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be *taken* and *delivered* into his hand:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "The men of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain, and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army were scattered from him; so they *took* the king, and *brought him up to the*

king of Babylon, to Riblah." (2 Kings xxv. 5.) —The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon, by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah," or as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "*spake judgments with him* at Riblah."—The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou shalt go to Babylon:" the history says, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." (Jer. lii. 11.)—"Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle.—"But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack, nor on the scaffold; was neither strangled nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings! he died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison.—"And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odours for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you

prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability.—Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus. —Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the Jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain, permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers.—But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conscious of the instability of human condition; and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the insolence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to revere

royalty even in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah. —Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavoured to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shewn, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition, and what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetical veracity:—particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a dishonest man: am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice in every thing respecting the

Bible, that, like a corrupted judge previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of truth?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however selecting for your observations such particularities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians: I would distinguish them thus: many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure; but flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets, have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies——they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies—because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurers, fortune-tellers, among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny; no

nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them: but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling, gentry—when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c. I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character: their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God: and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of scripture; particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed:—Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and

say, He saith; that prophesy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their sorcerers, "which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry, than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, "Behold the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers,

that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch, desolation of his country, and ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year before Christ 713; and, above an hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, (2 Kings xxiv. 13.) and when he commanded the master of his eunuchs, (Dan. i. 3.) that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram king of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha, (an high honour for one of your conjurers,) by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him,

—"Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother."—This you think shews Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity—it shews him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches:——this, you say, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it:"—but this is not a true representation of the case; the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come, "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water."—As to Elisha's cursing the little children who had mocked him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received is, by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man but as a prophet, and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand

by little children, but grown-up youths; the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown-up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserves punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, is no where said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of Christianity; and in my opinion cut up, by this concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuse his assent to the truth of Christianity. As to your saying, that the interpretations, which commentators and priests have made of these books, only shew the fraud, or the extreme folly, to which credulity and

priestcraft can go: I consider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidelity can carry a minute philosopher. You profess a fondness for science; I will refer you to a scientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a priest,—to Ferguson.—In a tract entitled—The Year of our Saviour's Crucifixion ascertained; and the darkness, at the time of his crucifixion, proved to be supernatural—this real philosopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the 9th chapter of Daniel, and concludes his dissertation in the following words—"Thus we have an astronomical demonstration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, seeing that the prophetic year of the Messiah's being cut off, was the very same with the astronomical." I have somewhere read an account of a solemn disputation which was held at Venice, in the last century, between a Jew and a Christian;—the Christian strongly argued from Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, that Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews had long expected, from the predictions of their prophets;—the learned Rabbi, who presided at this disputation, was so forcibly struck by the argument, that he put an end to the business, by saying

—"Let us shut up our Bibles; for if we proceed in the examination of this prophecy, it will make us all become Christians." Was it a similar apprehension which deterred you from so much as opening the book of Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this very prophecy—"Let him that readeth understand"—and I shall not despair of your conversion from deism to christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelation from God Almighty; but to have pretended to these things; and, under that disguise, to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, should have so little regard

to his own reputation as an impartial enquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel; in the 29th chapter, ver. 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said—"No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it; neither shall it be inhabited forty years:"—this, you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already reviewed are." Now that this did come to pass, we have, as Bishop Newton observes, "the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berosus, two heathen historians, who lived about 300 years before Christ; one of whom affirms, expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it, in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs *in Egypt*, and committed the *captives* whom he took in Egypt, to the care of some of his friends to bring them after him, he hasted directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no

testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been an hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass. The history of Egypt at so remote a period, being no where accurately and circumstantially related, I admit that no period can be pointed out, from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of an hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little farther into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this —"Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt."—This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie; I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for "as is the prophecy, so has been the event.

Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians; and after the Persians it became subject to the Macedonians; and after the Macedonians to the Romans; and after the Romans to the Saracens; and then to the Mamelukes; and is now a province of the Turkish empire."

Suffer me to produce to you from this author not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem, from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans.—"I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there."—How! not see Babylon, when he should die there! How, moreover, is this consistent, you may ask, with what Jeremiah had foretold—that Zedekiah should see the eyes of the king of Babylon?—This darkness of expression, and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah (as Josephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them: yet he unhappily experienced, and the fact is worthy your observation, the truth of them both.

He saw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but at Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he saw it not; and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekiel explained.

As to your wonderful discovery that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some gentile, "and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense, and to satirise the vicious and malignant character of a Bible prophet, or a predicting priest," I shall put it, covered with *hellebore*, for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy, of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance, and sottish self-sufficiency—"I have gone," you say, "through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an axe on his shoulders, and fell trees; here they lie;

and the priests if they can may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow."—And is it possible that you should think so highly of your performance, as to believe, that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book, which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which, by its celestial light, illumines the darkest ages of antiquity; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim; which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato; which has been illustrated by the labour of learning, in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it? No, Sir; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view; you have entangled yourself

in thickets of thorns and briars; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your axe, and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your stroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament hunting after difficulties, and you have found some real ones; these you have endeavoured to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been expected. Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable; you have excited the

scoffs of the profane; increased the scepticism of the doubtful; shaken the faith of the unlearned; suggested cavils to the "disputers of this world;" and perplexed the minds of honest men who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth.—This and more you have done in going through the Old Testament; but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes; that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry, of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians issued their decrees—"That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel—that all should fear and tremble before him"—and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers

of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that, through the seed of Abraham, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah; though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan? and that he should continue these manifestations of himself to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect should be the issue? You would expect that our posterity

would, in the remotest period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain against all opponents the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God to us and to our successors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same divine government, should, for want of such experience, refuse assent to their testimony. No; they would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence and of the moral government of God.

LETTER VII.

"The New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation."—Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If an heathen from *Athens* or *Rome*, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus, he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew Nicodemus did--"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."—Our Saviour tells the Jews—"Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me"—and he bids them search the Scriptures; for they

testified of him;—but, notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works"—"believe me for the very works' sake"—"if I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin."—These are sufficient proofs that the truth of Christ's mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion would not thereby be overturned.—That Jesus of Nazareth was the person, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition—that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another: and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

The "mere existence of such a woman as Mary, and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus, is," you say, "a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve."—Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its part—and we know that all the angles in the same segment of a circle are equal to each other—we have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist tomorrow, and that your father existed before you? You condescend, however, to think it probable, that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; and, without troubling yourself about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the sake of argument, but without positively granting, their existence, you proceed to inform us, "that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon," against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preach-

ing, not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, nay be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention before you will dress them up into any form which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable.—Impure indeed must that man's imagination be, who can

discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary—"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."—I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of a chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion; there would have been some for saying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration, or, which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say, be controverted:—first, "That the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree and the whole may be false;—secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves that the *whole cannot be true.* The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great

use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition. You will pardon my unskilfulness in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told by, at least, two persons (the life of Doctor Johnson, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr. Boswell). Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of any one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things, which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time; with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a

fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story, (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual,) every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility of the whole being false:—again, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the king of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine, or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact, (of Admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty,) if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points, should

be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding a disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence suspecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke—there is a disagreement between them; therefore, you say, "If Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood: and thence there is no authority for believing either; and if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards." I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion;—not your conclusion; because two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thousand years, cannot, on that account, be esteemed in-

competent to bear testimony to the transactions of his life, unless an intention to falsify could be proved against them. If two Welsh historians should at this time write the life of any remarkable man of their country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should, through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up their pedigree to *Cadwallon*, would they, on account of that difference, be discredited in every thing they said? Might it not be believed that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood?—I cannot admit your premises; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph the reputed father of Jesus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader, that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept, and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection;

and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation:—"From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of 1080 years; and as there were but 27 full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St. Matthew's list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide 1080 by 27, which gives 40 years for each person. As the life-time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose, that 27 generations should all be old batchelors, before they married. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie."—This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the conclusion is in a style which even its truth would not excuse:—yet the argument is good for nothing, and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities; read it over again, especially the books

of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical list of St. Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias.—I inquire not, in this place, whence this omission proceeded; whether it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist: still it is an omission. Now if you will add these three generations to the 27 you mention, and divide 1080 by 30, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born was 36. They married sooner than they ought to have done, according to Aristotle, who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age, when a man should marry. Nor was it necessary that they should have been old batchelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume in your argument, that the first born son succeeded the father in the list—this is not true. Solomon succeeded David; yet David had at least six sons, who were grown to manhood

before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had at least three sons before he had Abia (Abijah) who succeeded him.—It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ, mentioned by St. Matthew, is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all or by any of the others: and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself—it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus; from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance; such as the purity of his

manners; the sanctity of his doctrines; the multitude and publicity of his miracles; the persecuting spirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his resurrection: and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts. —Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected, that, instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus, is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth; notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us, that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says, he appeared unto Mary.—The angel, Sir, appeared unto them both; to Mary when he informed

her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph, some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elisabeth. It might have been expected, that, from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded these obviously distinct appearances; but men, even of candour, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who should say she was gotten with child by a ghost?—Who, but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with you on this subject.—You will never persuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod, is mentioned only by Matthew; and therefore you think it is a lie. We must give up all history if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance, of which they

must have had a melancholy remembrance; but gentile converts were less interested in that event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus; it is no wonder that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre, "was under two years of age, and yet he escaped; so that the story circumstantially belies itself."—John was six months older than Jesus: and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second: but without insisting upon this, still I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end

of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting, *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ when he was crucified.—I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves?—One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and though they had all the same meaning, yet it is probable, that, if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book called—The Rights of Man:—had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine—Thomas Paine, of America, author of the Rights of Man—and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was—This is Thomas Paine, the author

of The Rights of Man—another, The author of The Rights of Man—a third, This is the author of The Rights of Man—and a fourth, Thomas Paine, of America, the author of The Rights of Man—would any man of common sense have doubted, on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life?—"The only one," you tell us, "of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter."—This your assertion is not true—we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross.—You go on, "But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?" I will tell you why—because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, "Mark saying it was

at the third hour (nine in the morning,) and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose, at noon)." Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Doctor Middleton; much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy *you*; but there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced—That John, writing his gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time; which was the same as our own: so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o'clock in the morning; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so: and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection: and, as kindness produces

kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last suffering? Whom but John the friend of his heart?—Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which *Simeon* had foretold?—Whom but those, who had been attached to him through life; who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants?—These were the persons whom we should have expected to have attended his execution; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend?—And this did Jesus.—Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burden of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple—"Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." I own to you, that such instances as these, of the conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the gospels; and far outweigh a

thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion—the darkness which overspread the land—the rending of the veil of the temple—an earthquake which rent the rocks—and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city—"Such," you say, "is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles—the darkness—and the rending of the veil;—and their omission of the others does not prove that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles; they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus "was a righteous man"—"the Son of

God." And these two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead; but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote.—As to John not mentioning any of these miracles—it is well known that his gospel was written as a kind of supplement to the other gospels; he has therefore omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned; in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance: he tells us that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with

peculiar earnestness—"And he that saw it, bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."—John saw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is easily accounted for; but whence came the water? The anatomists tell us—that it came from the *pericardium*;—so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science!—You amuse yourself with the account of what the Scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them.—It is very possible that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject; it is enough for me to know that "Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and "that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth," as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I durst indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I

might be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to these saints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of Scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of the other evangelists, and of St. Paul also, on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many —if none of these things had been true, or rather if any one of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories? He wrote, as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who twenty years hence should address to the French nation an history of Louis XVI. would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were

split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris?—It is quite impossible to suppose, that any one would dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose, that Matthew would have dared to publish his account of what happened at the death of Jesus, had not that account been generally known to be true.

LETTER VIII.

THE "tale of the resurrection," you say, "follows that of the crucifixion."—You have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts, which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark—"If the writers of these books had gone into any court of justice to prove an *alibi*, (for it is of the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means,) and had given their evidence in the same contradictory manner, as it is here given, they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it"—"hard words, or hanging," it seems, if you had been their judge. Now I maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the

evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion; and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *vivâ voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural alibi.—Did you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard from eye-witnesses, that it was empty.—Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus, take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No.—Did the soldiers, or the Jews, take away the body? No.—How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and we saw it afterwards when it was alive.—How do you know that what you saw was the body of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly.—Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No: the body had flesh and bones; we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, for we saw the wound in the side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet.—And all this you are ready to swear? We are; and we are ready

to die also, sooner than we will deny any part of it.—This is the testimony which all the evangelists would give, in whatever court of justice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would sufficiently establish the alibi of the dead body from the sepulchre by supernatural means.

But as the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice, but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, "states that when Christ was put in the sepulchre, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples."—I admit this account, but it is not the whole of the account: you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate—"Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again."—It is material to remark this; for at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard.

—"He shewed to his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21.) These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and, instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose, that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second.—The other books, you observe, "say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and according to these accounts there were none."—This, Sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things; how often must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact a denial of it?

You go on—"The book of Matthew continues its account, that at the end of the sabbath, as it began to *dawn*, towards the first day of the week, came *Mary Magdalene* and the other *Mary* to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sun-rising, and John says it was dark. Luke says, it

was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and *Mary the mother of James*, and *other women*, that came to the sepulchre; and John says that Mary Magdalene came alone. So well do they agree about their first evidence! they all appear, however, to have known most about Mary Magdalene; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll."—This is a long paragraph; I will answer it distinctly:—first, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre; all the evangelists agree as to the day on which they went; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning; what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence, as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women's having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre. John states that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre; but he does not state, *as you make him state*, that Mary Magdalene went alone; she might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove, to

the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke:—is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal person going on a visit, or an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants? Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wish it to be considered, whether there is any scriptural authority for that imputation; and whether there be or not, I must contend, that a repentant and reformed woman ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture, which you adopt concerning her, is nothing less than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny, not excusable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in yours.

The book of Matthew, you observe, goes on to say—"And behold there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and *sat upon it*:—but the other books say nothing about any earthquake,"—what then? does their silence prove that there was none?—"nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;"—what then? does their silence

prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it?—"and according to their accounts there was no angel sitting there." This conclusion I must deny; their accounts do not say there was no angel sitting there, at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they all take notice that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away: hence it is evident that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre, is no where mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance; or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within.

Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting."—It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance—Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on still minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake—that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.

As to your inference, from Matthew's using the expression *unto this day*, "that the book must have been manufactured after a lapse of some generations at least," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it; it is not worthy either your notice or mine, except as it

is a strong instance to you, to me, and to every body how far prejudice may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearances of Christ after his pretended resurrection; the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre said to the two Marys, (chap. xxviii. 7.) "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The gospel, Sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men: and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity; to guard them against the errors of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find that the angel did not say, "Behold, Christ *is gone* before you into Galilee,"—but, "Behold, *he goeth* before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone:—it might be properly rendered, he will go; and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate

setting out for Galilee: when a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say *he is gone;* for he tells us immediately afterwards, that as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now how Jesus could be *gone* into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression—"then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then;* the passage is better translated—and the eleven. Christ had said to his disciples, (Matt. xxvi. 32.) "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee:" —and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction—*He is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee.* Matthew, intent upon the appearance in

Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and, by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus, with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution; for you say—"It is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem: and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee; and consequently the evidence given in those books destroys each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much ac-

customed to drawing of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner; she taught me—that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion. I have shewn your position—that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection—to be false, and hence your consequence—that the evidence given in those two books destroys each other—is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem, till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon *Luke* as one of the eleven, and in other places you speak of him as an eyewitness of the things he relates; you ought to have known that Luke was no apostle; and he tells you himself, in the preface to his gospel,

that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design, (which I am unwilling to suspect,) you are still less fit; in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate.—"Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum total of whose learning," according to you, "is a b ab, and hic, hæc, hoc, there is not one amongst them," you say, "who can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid."—If I should admit this, (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do,) yet I cannot admit that there is one amongst them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank Luke the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of this fallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not shew himself to all the people after his resurrection.—This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen; but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them: he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect, that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council, and said—"What do we? for this man doeth many mira-

cles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him;—then from that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ; it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shewn himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered another council, have opened it with, What do we? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he shewed himself to every man in Jerusalem; for then we should have had a suspicion, that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen; and for this reason—his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a

matter of fact; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make this appeal?—Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth.—You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years; that, during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews, that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the gospel in other parts; that, about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who, after his departure, had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he asserts, "that

Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive. An appeal to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses, is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot, had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove, any such thing; and therefore we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true: and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof."—I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission;

and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they "were endued with power from on high." Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it; for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary—"Touch me not; for I am not yet *ascended* to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I *ascend* unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension; and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed, that the omission was made, on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known, may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being *by the right hand of God* exalted."—Paul bears testimony also to the ascension, when he says, that Jesus was *received up into glory*. As to

the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there, which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and when it is considered that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many, and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books."—What am I to say to this? Am I to say that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge.—John says, that Jesus appeared to

his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them.—The same John says, that after *eight days* he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them.—Now, Sir, how *apparently three or four days* can be consistent with *really eight days*, I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place* or *time*—for he says—After these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem, on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection) Jesus shewed himself again to his disciples at the sea of *Tiberias*. The sea of Tiberias, I presume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer, as to the *same spot Jerusalem*, as to your apparently *three or four days?*—But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his gospel, and says—"Christ shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of

God :" instead of *four*, you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew, with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times—We have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say.—Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the Baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission in the most unequivocal terms; he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was

really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates both these circumstances: had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impossible! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted."—Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted? Impossible! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted:—The disciples saw Jesus, at a distance, on the mountain; and some of them fell down and worshipped him; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and spake unto them.

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resur-

rection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man, in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact; and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre; or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render an harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better then, in angling with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there

is) an irreconcileable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection.—Be it so; what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity, in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer; and I leave it to your consideration. I have, purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists; well knowing that you would have rejected with scorn any thing I could have said on that point; but, in disputing with a deist, I do most solemnly contend, that the christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptation, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

Unbelievers, in general, wish to conceal their sentiments; they have a decent respect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil society. Some few have been more daring, but less judicious; and have, with-

out disguise, professed their unbelief. But you are the first who ever swore that he was an infidel, concluding your deistical creed with—So help me God! I pray that God may help you: that he may, through the influence of his Holy Spirit, bring you to a right mind; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear, that you think the christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what?—of an opinion.—It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact: it is the oath of St. Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that, in what he told them of his miraculous conversion, he did not tell a lie: "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not."—Do but give that credit to Paul which I give to you, do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of your becoming a christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes.—There is nothing in deism but what is in christianity, but there is much in christianity which is not in deism. The christian has no doubt concerning a future state; every deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through the intercession of a mediator; the deist is harassed with apprehension lest the moral justice of God should demand, with inexorable rigour, punishment for transgression. The christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer; the deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the goodness of God, which wants not to be intreated; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The christian admits the providence of God, and the liberty of human actions; the deist is involved in great difficulties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The christian has as-

surance that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities; the deist does not deny the possibility that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

LETTER IX.

"Those," you say, "who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose that the book called the New Testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ; but the fact is historically otherwise: there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived."—This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers: it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book, called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts; concerning seven of these, viz. the Epistles to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation, there were at first some doubts; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted

with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical, at all times, and by all christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelations, are enumerated as canonical in the Constitutions of that council; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were not in *general use* amongst christians, long before the council of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the subject; it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am, and, probably, than you are,—*Mosheim.* "The opinions," says this author, "or rather the conjectures, of the learned concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is however sufficient for us to know, that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every christian so-

ciety throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured, that the *four gospels* were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose, that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds, and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons, whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the

doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books that were truly apostolical and divine, from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the apology for the christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate, and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a falsity in a petition, which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the king and parliament of Great Britain, than in this apology.—Yet in this apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of *all the four gospels are quoted*, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday, a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the christians. I forbear pursuing this matter farther; else it might easily be shewn, that probably the gospels, and certainly some of St. Paul's epistles, were known to *Clement*, *Ignatius*, and *Polycarp*, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist: and therefore, though you

could make it out that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title, till three hundred and fifty years after Christ; yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books, of which it is composed, were written, and most of them received by all christians, within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.—Are you ignorant then that the Jews used the phrase three days and three nights to denote what we understand by three days?—It is said in Genesis, chap. vii. 12. "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights;" and this is equivalent to the expression, (ver. 17.) "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Instead then of saying three days and three nights, let us simply say—three days—and you will not object to Christ's being three days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but an hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all

nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole.—Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of *Faustus*, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, *Michaelis*, to tell you something about this Faustus?—"He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation: he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the gospel affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends, that the gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person." You know who has argued like Faustus, but I did not think myself authorized on that account to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but Michaelis makes a still more severe conclusion concerning Faustus; and he extends his observation to every man who argued like him—"A man capable of

such an argument must have been ignorant not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Faustus, but even of the Commentaries of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose, that, preferring the arts of sophistry to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." (Marsh's Transl.) Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument; he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension; and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the

resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles, which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul; whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's Epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it:—"I certify you, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the story of the resurrection, but he does much more; he asserts, that he was himself

a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been *a* witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary: you represent him as struck by lightning.—It is somewhat extraordinary for a man, who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner:—the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that, notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immedi-

ately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis! —In the character of Paul you discover a great deal of violence and fanaticism; and such men, you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach.—Read, Sir, Lord *Lyttelton*'s observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul; and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject—"Besides all the proofs of the christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, is, of itself, a demonstration sufficient to prove christianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have some weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist, or of an a b ab priest,—but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendor from his talents.

You are displeased with St. Paul "for setting

out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body." —You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine.—" In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the christian faith) I find our Saviour and the apostles to preach the *resurrection of the dead*, and the *resurrection from the dead*, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr. Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it; (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach;) but as you are discrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to shew that what you attempt to discredit is the doctrine of the apostle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body —you will have a better body,—" your natural body will be raised a spiritual body, your corruptible will put on incorruption." You are so

much out of humour with your present body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought, that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority not only over insects, fishes, snails, and spiders, (which you represent as excelling us in loco-motive powers,) but over all the animals of the creation; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the only conceivable idea of a future life—it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body; it does not inform us, whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, "that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existencies into the same person."

From a caterpillar's passing into a torpid state

resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, "Why must I believe, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter?"—I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects, and kept within due bounds:—But where is it said in Scripture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence? Those who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend, that the soul is the substance in which consciousness is continued without interruption:—those who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep; and that it may as easily be restored after death, as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct, but dormant. Those who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not a substance but a mere quality, will maintain, that the consciousness appertaining to every individual per-

son is not lost when the body is destroyed; that it is known to God; and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuse in applying vulgar and offensive epithets to men who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be holden, in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced; it remains long after the wound is healed; and your abuse of holy men and holy things will be remembered, when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten. Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters and impostors; the Jewish kings a parcel of rascals; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, liars; and Paul a fool, for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject that ever occupied the mind of man—the lesson in our burial service;—this lesson you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell

at the funeral. Men of low condition! pressed down, as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under burdens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this lesson read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend? Was it mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell?—No.—You understood from it, that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment at the last trump; you understood from it, that this corruptible must put on incorruption, that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labour will not be in vain.

You seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy; you speak more than once of Euclid; and, in censuring St. Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apostle says—one star differeth from another star in glory—he ought to have said—in distance.—All men *see* that one

star differeth from another star in glory or brightness; but few men *know* that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not *know* it. You make an assumption which you cannot prove—that the stars are *equal* in magnitude, and placed at *different* distances from the earth;—but you cannot prove that they are not *different* in magnitude, and placed at *equal* distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth, as to have any sensible annual *parallax*.—I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject; but it really moves one's indignation, to see a smattering in philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle.—"Little learning is a dangerous thing."

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist; and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation—"Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die;"—to which one might reply, in his own language, and say—"Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die *not*."

It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said—that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:—every husbandman in Corinth, though unable perhaps to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him that a grain of wheat must become *rotten* in the ground before it could sprout: and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcass in the grave.—Doctor *Clarke* observes, "In like manner as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute insensible seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear, and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuviæ*, as it were, of some hidden and at present insensible principle, (pos-

sibly the present seat of the soul,) which at the resurrection shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for such I esteem him in this philosophical conjecture ;) but the quotation may serve to shew you, that the germ does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till all the rest of the grain is *corrupted;* that is, in the language and meaning of St. Paul, till it *dies.*—Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expression, when he foretells the numerous disciples which his death would produce—" Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."—You perceive from this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its reproduction :—hence every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly, (which you think applies to the case,) I am of opinion he would not have used that illustration in preference to

what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference.—So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance: for if the epistles, ascribed to Paul, were written by him, (and there is unquestionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus:—St. Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the christian faith; in these letters he affirms two things;—first, that he had wrought miracles in their presence;—secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The persons to whom these letters were addressed, must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie; they must have known, whether they had seen

him work miracles: they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts.—Now can you, or can any man, believe, for a moment, that Paul (a man certainly of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read?—Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the christian religion is true. References to these two points are frequent in St. Paul's epistles: I will mention only a few. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he says, (chap. iii. 2, 5.) "This only would I learn of you, received ye the spirit (gifts of the spirit) by the works of the law?—He ministreth to you the spirit, and worketh miracles among you."—To the Thessalonians he says, (1 Thess. ch. i. 5.) "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost."—To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself: (1 Cor. ii. 4.) "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power;"—and he adds the reason for his working miracles —"That your faith should not stand in the wis-

dom of men, but in the power of God."—With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them! There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point—the genuineness of Paul's Epistles proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof: for it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true: and if Paul's Epistles be both genuine and authentic, the christian religion is true.—Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner:—"Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament) and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion." You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, Sir, has withstood the learning of *Porphyry*, and the power of *Julian*, to say nothing of the manichean *Faustus*—it has resisted the genius of *Bolingbroke*, and the wit of *Voltaire*,

to say nothing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants—and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule; dipped them in your deadliest poison; aimed them with your utmost skill; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigour; but, like the feeble javelin of aged *Priam*, they will scarcely reach the mark, will fall to the ground without a stroke.

LETTER X.

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, *strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.* I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language; and am sincerely sorry that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being, as the creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your—conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the Age of Reason: in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds—mystery, miracle and prophecy.—I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects; they are subjects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in our opinion concerning them; but I confess, I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader, or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man: yet "the thing so revealed," you say, "is revelation to the person only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation."—This is true; his account is simple testimony. You add, "there is no possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he says."—This I positively deny: and contend, that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation.

I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position; I have examined them with care; I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when, in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites—"If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me."—So thought Elijah, when he said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant;"—and the people, before whom he spake, were of the same opinion; for, when the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said—"The Lord he is the God."—So thought our Saviour, when he said—"The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me;" and, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not." What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a divine commission; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture

of man. The reason is evident; Jesus established his pretensions, not by alleging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all.—Nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom God would, at a particular time, send into the world for a particular end; and at length a person should appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished: such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation, which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say, (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying) that he had a commission to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict—that, after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day;—the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said concerning the will of God. Now I

tell you, (says Jesus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him,) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he. In various parts of the gospels our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the Christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the Christian religion, and with a supercilious negligence to class Christ and his apostles amongst the impostors who have figured in the world; but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man, of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches?—The prophet Micah shall answer you: it teacheth us—"to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;"—justice, mercy, and piety,

instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman.—Absurd and impious assertion! No, Sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of Scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as to believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove: the lesson is this—"The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live: all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which, in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however,—

"As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion."—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."—Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentred essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation; does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you, that this distinction is done away? when it bids you "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of *Frederic*, or *Justinian;* you cannot find them in our statute books; they were not taught, nor are they taught, in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the gospel, and in the gospel alone, that we

learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts, to a christian they are indispensable duties. —Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another;" the law of christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself in the most solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies—Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase—"If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also?"—Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained, in another place, to mean, the doing them all the good in our power; "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink:"

and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—"it does not offer a premium for a crime,"—it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

In the law of Moses, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.—*Aristotle*, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding; *Rhadamanthus* is said to have given it his sanction; the decemviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom: but the mild spirit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

"It has been," you affirm, "the scheme of the christian church to hold man in ignorance of

the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights."—I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable God, blessed for ever? By these means which the christian church hath provided for our instruction, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregation of christians in Great Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of the Creator, as all the world was when God called Abraham from

his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no communication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now,) to *the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above;* then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendent flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What design has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever.—All wise statesmen are persuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights; they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions; and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no

fear that the people should know too much of their rights; my fear is that they should not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires, and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace, under vain pretences; that they should make themselves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man; I have long ago understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature, some rights, which no human government can justly take from them, without their tacit or express consent; and some also, which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or of society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune.—Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right? So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and defend this right; nay, it gives right, where nature gives none; it protects the goods

of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage, and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part; without them, its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water; it would presently sink into a fetid, senseless mass of corruption.—Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained; riches may be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied: but as this is neither necessarily, nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those who, in asserting the natural equality of men, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank, and riches.—But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your crimination of government

appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to express my hope, that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, as to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the supremest veneration for its Author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavouring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun, hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course?—Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other?—It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of above ten millions of miles in a minute,

will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years.—We think this earth a great globe; and we see the sad wickedness, which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt: we view, with still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space!—Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature.—As percipient beings, we look for something more—for his goodness—and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective

orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution, inseparable from the material structure of their bodies: but no gap is thereby left in existence; their place is occupied by other individuals capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here? why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, he hath redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death, which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity.—You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt; you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through sin, through disobedience to the command of God.—Be it so. —You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever means it was introduced:

this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge.—The New Testament tells us, that, through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost:—this also you refuse to believe.—Why? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption. Miserable reason! stupid objection! What is there that you can account for? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest—and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man, a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children, all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity? We are children in the hand of God: we are in

the very infancy of our existence; just separated from the womb of eternal duration; it may not be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in apprehension!) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these qualities, we know not: whether God could or could not, consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam, without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not: so that, if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then

may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom and goodness of all God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of deism; it is so much better than atheism, that I mean not to say any thing to its discredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to-day than he was yesterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to-morrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here and a part there, or a whole any where? What think you of an omniscient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being, who existed through eternity, without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend

that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a deist.—I contemplate, with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ, and am a

christian.—As a deist I have little expectation; as a christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion. You and other men may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter—from the faculties of the human mind—from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world—from many modes of analogical reasoning, and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence, but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess, that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think then with what thankfulness of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me, that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die;" yet "in Christ (by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive." I lay hold on "eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ;" I consider

it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he has constituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deism," you affirm, "teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known."—There are three things, which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known—the being of God—the providence of God—a future state of retribution.—Whether these three truths are so taught us by deism, that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of these points. I will advert, briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labours of *Gassendi*, *Cudworth*, *Clarke*, *Baxter*, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the hu-

man soul is as little understood by us, as it was by the philosophers of Greece or Rome. The opposite opinions of *Plato* and of *Epicurus*, on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present age, in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world: and they who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give from reason a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent, than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They shew the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance from the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency, (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply,) you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the Gospel, as the *Nor-*

thumbrian heathens said of *Paulinus*, by whom they were converted to the Christian religion—"The more we reflect on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. Whilst it animates our body, we may know some of its properties; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since then the *gospel* pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it, and, laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason."

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every thing which it much concerns us to know! We are principally concerned in knowing—not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science—not the histories of mighty empires desolating the globe by their contentions—not the subtilties of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism.—These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few; but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all; they must, of necessity, re-

main in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution, bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition equally concerned in knowing—what will become of us after death;—and, if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing—whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here, which may render that future life an happy one.—Now, "that thing called Christianity," as you sneffingly speak—that last best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the gospel of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both these points. It tells us, what deism never could have told us, that we shall certainly be raised from the dead—that, whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live for ever—and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlasting life an happy one.—These are tremendous truths to bad men; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous action, as deism could not furnish even to *Brutus* himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life; and some may have hypocritically professed christianity from prospects of temporal advantage; but, being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such, from want of information on the subject of religion; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer: and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to christian perfection!) co-operating with their want of scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another, founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. Presuming, however, that many deists are as sincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that some are more able, and all as much interested as myself, to make a rational inquiry into the

truth of revealed religion, I feel no propensity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not think as I do, on a subject surpassing all others in importance; but they are not on that account, to be spoken of by me with asperity of language, to be thought of by me as persons alienated from the mercies of God. The gospel has been offered to their acceptance; and from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that persuasion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit: these are not improper incentives to honourable activity; but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge an hope, that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed, it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent; but you are endeavouring to extend the malignity of its poison through all the classes of the community. There is a class of men, for whom I have the greatest respect, and whom I am anxious to preserve from the

contamination of your irreligion—the merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen of the kingdom. I consider the influence of the example of this class as essential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects.

If this little book should chance to fall into their hands after they have read yours, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered, I intreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertency; to my inability; to any thing, rather than to an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes, as may unhappily have imbibed, from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that "evil heart of unbelief," which has brought ruin

on a neighbouring nation; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world may ever induce them to forget, that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my *Apology for Christianity*, I informed Mr. Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have, through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate; such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me; nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

Calgarth Park,
Jan. 20, 1796.

A

DEFENCE

OF

REVEALED RELIGION,

IN

TWO SERMONS,

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF LANDAFF;

AND

A CHARGE,

DELIVERED TO

THE CLERGY OF THAT DIOCESE, IN JUNE, 1795.

Fourth Edition.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following discourses are published, in compliance with the united request of the principal clergy and laity, before whom they were delivered. They assured me, that, at this conjuncture, a publication of them would be peculiarly useful in my diocese. If this their partiality of judgment (for such I must esteem it) should in fact be verified in any degree, I shall have no reason to regret my having yielded to a solicitation urged by such respectable authority, and in the most obliging manner. At all events, I intreat the inhabitants of my diocese to accept this publication, as a small proof of my sincere desire to promote, according to my poor ability, their spiritual welfare. I have no place of residence amongst them; but I have not, I trust, during any part of the thirteen years in which I have been connected with them, been unmindful of the duties of my station.

R. L.

LANDAFF,
July 2d, 1795.

SERMON I.

COL. ii. 8.

BEWARE LEST ANY MAN SPOIL YOU THROUGH PHILOSOPHY.

THIS apostolic admonition is peculiarly applicable to the age in which we live. It has been called—the age of philosophy—the age of reason: if by reason and philosophy, irreligion be understood, it undoubtedly merits the appellation; for there never was an age since the death of Christ, never one since the commencement of the history of the world, in which atheism and infidelity have been more generally professed. Nature and reason have been proclaimed as gods, festivals have been instituted in honour of abstract ideas, and all revealed religion has been scoffingly rejected as a system of statecraft and priestcraft, as a gross imposition on the understanding of mankind.

This impious fever of the mind, this paralysis of human intellect, originated in a neighbouring nation; its contagion has been industriously introduced, and is rapidly spreading in our own; it becomes us all in our several stations to endeavour to stop its progress; for of this we may all be well assured, that when religion shall have lost its hold on men's consciences, government will lose its authority over their persons, and a state of barbarous anarchy will ensue.

I know it has been made a question both in ancient and modern times—whether a society of atheists could subsist. This is no question with me; I think it could not. Many speculative opinions, in every system of religion, are of little consequence to the safety of the community, and, in all well regulated states, they are left to the free discussion of those, who think themselves interested, as advocates for truth, in defending or opposing them; but atheism seems to be irreconcileably hostile, not only to the peace, but to the very existence of civil society. If there be no God, there can be no punishment for any crime, except what is denounced against it by the laws of the land, or what is connected with

it by the laws of nature; and these are restraints incapable of controlling the selfish and licentious passions of human kind. He who removes from the mind of man the hopes and fears of futurity, opens the floodgates of immorality, and lets in a deluge of vices and crimes, destructive alike of the dignity of human nature, and of the tranquillity of the world. There never yet hath existed, and there never can exist, a nation without religion. If christianity be abolished, paganism, mahometanism, some religious imposture or other must be introduced in its stead, or civil society must be given up. But in the opinion of *Bacon*, (a philosopher with whom our modern philosophers cannot be compared) "there hath not in any age been discovered any philosophy, opinion, religion, law, or discipline, which so greatly exalts the common, and lessens individual interest, as the christian religion doth;" so that I know not which most to admire and deplore, their wickedness as men, or their weakness as statesmen, who have attempted to govern mankind without religion, and to establish society on the ruins of christianity.

The time, usually allotted to discourses from

this place, will not allow me to refute at length the atheistic tenets, or to answer the deistic objections which have been so recently propagated to the downfall of one nation, and to the danger of all; I will, however, crave your patience, whilst I state some arguments of importance, in opposition to the principles of those philosophers, who have been the authors of this mischief in a foreign country, and of their admirers in our own.

Nature and reason, they tell us, are their gods. Let them not impose upon themselves and others by the use of words, the meaning of which they do not understand. What is nature? What is reason?—These terms ought to be defined, for there is cause to suspect, that men who introduce, or who adopt, such impiety of expression, are rather ignorant of what atheism is, than that they are, what they affect to be thought, atheists on conviction. By nature then we may understand, the order and constitution of things composing the universe—and by reason, that faculty of the human mind by which we are able to discover truth.—And can it be thought, that this system of things, consisting of an infinity of parts fitted

to answer ends which human wisdom can never comprehend in their full extent, but which, as far as it can comprehend them, appear to be beneficial to man and all other percipient beings—can it be thought, that this system had not an intelligent, benevolent, powerful Author?

When a man makes a watch, builds a ship, erects a silk-mill, constructs a telescope, we do not scruple to say, that the man has a design in what he does. And can we say, that this solar system, a thousand times more regular in all its motions than watches, ships, or silk-mills—that the infinity of other systems dispersed through the immensity of space, inconceivably surpassing in magnitude and complication of motion, this, of which our earth is but a minute part—or even that the eye which now reads what is here written, a thousand times better fitted for its function than any telescope—can we say, that there was no design in the formation of these things?

Tell us not, that it is allowed there must be intelligence in an artificer who makes a watch or a telescope, but that, as to the Artificer of the universe, we cannot comprehend his nature.

What then? shall we on that account deny his existence? With better reason might a grub, buried in the bowels of the earth, deny the existence of a man, whose nature it cannot comprehend; for a grub is indefinitely nearer to man in all intellectual endowments (if the expression can be permitted) than man is to his Maker.—With better reason may we deny the existence of an intellectual faculty in the man who makes a machine; we know not the nature of the man; we see not the mind which contrives the figure, size, and adaptation of the several parts; we simply see the hand which forms and puts them together.

Shall a shipwrecked mathematician, on observing a geometrical figure accurately described on the sand of the sea-shore, encourage his followers with saying, "Let us hope for the best, for I see the traces of man;"—and shall not man, in contemplating the structure of the universe, or of any part of it, say to the whole human race—Brethren! be of good comfort, we are not begotten of chance, we are not born of atoms, our progenitors have not come into existence by crawling out of the mud of the Nile; behold the

footsteps of a Being powerful, wise, and good—not nature, but the God of nature, the Father of the universe?

I will not entangle the understanding of my audience, or bewilder mine own, in the labyrinths of metaphysical researches; but I must say to these—the great philosophers of the age—you ought to know, that matter cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Plato*, you contend for the eternity of matter, you ought to know, that motion connot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Aristotle*, you contend for the eternity of motion, you ought to know, that with him also you must contend for the eternity of a first mover—you must introduce, what you labour to exclude, a God, causing, regulating, and preserving, by established laws, the motion of every particle of matter in the universe.

You affirm that nature is your God, and you inform us that the energy of nature is the cause of every thing—that nature has power to produce a man.—In all this you seem to substitute the term nature for what we understand by the term God. But when you tell us that nature

acts (if such exertion can be called action) necessarily and without intelligence, we readily acknowledge that your God is essentially different from our God. "All novelty is but oblivion;" this famous *system of nature*, which has excited so much unmerited attention, and done such incredible mischief throughout Europe, is in little or in nothing different from the system of certain atheistic philosophers mentioned by *Cicero*, who maintained, that "nature was a certain energy, destitute of intelligence, exciting in bodies necessary motions."—The answer is obvious and short—an energy destitute of freedom and of intelligence cannot produce a man possessing both; as well may it be said, that an effect may be produced without a cause.

The proof of the existence of a Supreme Being, which is derived from the constitution of the visible world, is of a popular cast; but you must not therefore suppose it to be calculated to convince only persons who cannot reason philosophically. What think you of *Newton*? He certainly could reason philosophically. He certainly, of all the sons of men, best understood the structure of the universe; and he esteemed

that structure to be so irrefragable a proof of the existence and providence of an almighty, wise, and good Architect of nature, that he never pronounced the word—God—without a pause.—What think you of *Cotes*—second in sublimity of philosophic genius to none but *Newton?*—"That man," says he, "must be blind, who, from the most wise and excellent disposal of things, cannot immediately perceive the infinite wisdom and goodness of their almighty Creator; and he must be mad, who refuses to acknowledge them."

The argument, which I have been hitherto insisting upon, may be called a natural argument for the Being of God, as it is taken from the contemplation of nature; I proceed to another of great weight, which may be called an historical argument, as it is grounded on testimony concerning past transactions.

That this world has not been from eternity, but that it was either created from nothing, or fitted up by the Supreme Being for the habitation of man, a few thousand years ago—that it was afterwards destroyed by an universal deluge,

brought upon it by the same Being—that it has been repeopled by the descendants of three men, who escaped the general destruction—these things are either ancient facts, or ancient fables—if they are facts, both atheism and infidelity must be given up—and that they are facts and not fables, might, if time would permit, be satisfactorily proved from a detailed examination of the history of every nation in the world.

The credible annals of all nations, not excepting Egypt or Chaldea, China or India, fall short of the deluge.—The annals of all nations, ancient and modern, barbarous and civilized, speak of a deluge as of a dreadful catastrophe which had destroyed human kind, through the interposition of a superior Being offended by the vices of the world.—The annals of all nations bear witness to the existence of a God who had created all things, for even in the time of *Aristotle* there was, as he observes, "an ancient tradition (he does not say a deduction of reason, but a report or tradition) which all men had derived from their ancestors, that all things were from God, and that by God all things did consist."—(εκ τȣ Θεȣ τα παντα, και δια Θεȣ ημιν συνεςτηκεν. Arist. de

Mund. Cr.)—Remarkable words these! and analogous to those of *St. Paul*, speaking of Christ, and, as is generally thought, on the creation of the material world, "All things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all thing consist." (*τα παντα δι' αυτου και εις αυτον εκτισται, και αυτος εστι προ παντων, και τα παντα εν αυτω συνεστηκε.* Col. i. 17.)

He who has employed most time in examining the history of remote ages, will be most convinced of the truth of the following propositions —that profane authors derived their notions of a Supreme Being from patriarchal tradition—that they corrupted this tradition—that the Bible is the only book in the world in which this tradition is preserved in its original purity—that this invaluable book throws light upon the origin and ancient history of every nation in the world—and that the history of the Jews, contained in the Bible, and connected with their history to the present time, is the strongest proof which can be brought, not only against atheism, but against that species of deism which contends that God never visibly interposed in the government of the Jewish nation.

When it is said that the annals of all nations fall short of the deluge, it must be understood, that the nation of the Jews is excepted. I look upon that people with astonishment and reverence; they are living proofs of facts most ancient and most interesting to mankind. Where do we meet with an Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman, corroborating, by his testimony, any one of the events mentioned in the history of their respective empires? But we meet with millions of Jews in every quarter, and in every country of the world, who acknowledge not only the existence of a God, as other nations do—but that he is the very God who enabled Moses to work miracles in Egypt; who delivered to him that law which they now observe; who called Abraham, the father of their nation, from the midst of his idolatrous kinsmen; who preserved Noah and his family in the ark; who formed Adam out of the dust of the earth; who created all things by the word of his power.

Wherever we have a Jew on the surface of the earth, there we have a man, whose testimony and whose conduct connect the present time with the beginning of all time. He now believes,

and he declares that all his progenitors have constantly believed, the history contained in the book of Moses to be a true history—he now obeys the laws which God gave to Moses above three thousand years ago—now practises the circumcision which God enjoined to Abraham—now observes the passover in commemoration of the mercy vouchsafed to his nation when God destroyed the first-born throughout the land of Egypt—now keeps holy the seventh day, on which God rested from the works of the creation. When nations institute rites to preserve the memory of great events, the uniform observance of the rite authorizes us to admit the certainty of the fact. The Jews have for thousands of years (and the patriarchs, before the Jews, probably did the same) observed a very significant rite in commemoration of the creation; and another in commemoration of their preservation from one of the plagues of Egypt: why should we hesitate to admit the certainty of these events? Adam lived with Methuselah two hundred and forty years, Methuselah lived with Shem the son of Noah ninety-eight years, and Shem lived with Abraham one hundred and fifty years: what ap-

prehension can we reasonably entertain that the account of the creation could either have been forged or misrepresented, when it had passed through so few hands before it reached the founder of the Jewish nation?

But I have already gone beyond the limit I had prescribed to myself in this argument, I cannot pursue it farther; sceptical men, however, will do well to consider the nature and weight of historic evidence, not only for the existence of God, but for his having made a revelation of himself to the Jewish nation. Let them examine the matter freely and fully, and I cannot but believe that they will come to the following conclusions—that the creation is a fact—that the deluge is a fact—that the repeopling the world by the descendants of Noah is a fact—that the Jewish theocracy is a fact—and that these facts may be established, as all past transactions of great antiquity must be, by the authority of history, and especially by the history of the Jews, whom God appears to have constituted witnesses of his existence and providence to all nations in all ages. Of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Tyrians, and of

other nations, God hath made, or will make, a *full end: but the seed of Israel shall not cease from being a nation before him for ever.*

If the refutation of atheism and deism be so easy and certain as I have here stated it to be, whence comes it that there are now so many, or that there ever were any either atheists, or unbelievers in the truth of the Jewish and Christian dispensations? I put these dispensations together, because those amongst us (I speak not of the Jews) who deny or admit the divine mission of Moses, will deny also or admit the divine mission of Jesus Christ.

There are many causes of infidelity, such as—profligacy of manners, which induces men to hope that religion may not be true—want of serious attention to the proofs on which it is established—hasty conclusions that, because some religions have been proved to be impostures, all are so—superstitious ceremonies and revolting doctrines, which are, in many parts of christendom, pertinaciously maintained as parts of christianity—intolerance, secularity, hypocrisy, conspicuous in the lives of Christians—these and other causes of

infidelity might be enlarged upon at great length; but I will only beg your attention to one other, less obvious, and less general, but more dangerous than any of those which I have mentioned—more dangerous, inasmuch as it operates chiefly on the minds of men of the most cultivated and enlarged understandings, I mean—mistaken piety.

That the Creator and Governor of the universe, who endureth through eternity, and filleth immensity; that this Almighty Being, who hath distributed innumerable systems of material worlds through the profundity of space, and hath, probably, replenished them all with percipient beings, capable of enjoying the happiness which his goodness hath wisely allotted to their respective stations; that this self-existent, uncaused cause of all being, whom no language can describe, no thought can comprehend, should at sundry times and in divers instances have suspended the laws of nature which he had established, visited in an extraordinary manner this little globe, this atom of the universe, and by signs and wonders have made a revelation of his will to such a worm as man—this appears to many men, of good lives

and strong minds, so strange a fact, that they are persuaded no human testimony can establish its credibility. They venerate the majesty of the Supreme Being, they are persuaded that all things were made by him, and that all things are sustained by him; but they think that it derogates from the infinity of his wisdom and of his power, to suppose things to have been at first so ill made, as to require his subsequent interposition to regulate or amend them.

Blessed God! what is this but making our ways thy ways, but measuring thy infinity by the standard of our philosophy? We know the difficulty of regulating the minute concerns of a kingdom, a province, or a family, by special interpositions of any one man's wisdom or authority; and thence we may simply infer, that the interposition of the Almighty in governing every part of the universe is a circumstance not to be expected. We know that a machine of our construction approaches to perfection in proportion as it wants not external aid to direct or preserve its motion, and thence we simply infer that the works of God, which cannot but be perfect in their kind, want not his interposition. Absolute

perfection belongs to God alone; in all the things which he hath made there is a gradation of excellence, each thing is as perfect as its nature will admit:—now why may it not be the nature of man to admit indefinite improvement from divine institution? It will be granted that man would be a more perfect being than he is, if, on all occasions, his passions were kept in subjection to his reason, if he was guilty of no impiety towards his Maker, of no uncharitableness towards his neighbour, of no violence towards himself in an intemperate indulgence of his appetites:—where then is the absurdity of supposing that God may have thought fit to strengthen the reason and to weaken the passions of mankind by bringing *immortality to light*, by giving an actual example of a resurrection from the dead, by promulgating the certainty of rewards and punishments in another state?

Surely it is a mistaken piety, which, from a sublime idea of the Divine Essence, would exclude the Supreme Being from interfering in the works which he hath made, which would hinder him from still working, till he hath brought all things to that perfection for which his goodness in-

tempted them. What that perfection is we know not; it must ever fall infinitely short of the perfection of God himself, but it is not possible for us to say to what degree it may be advanced, or to point out the best means fitted to advance it to the degree predetermined in the councils of the Almighty. We cannot look into the depths of God's wisdom, nor comprehend the ends he has in view, or the ways by which he effects them.

It is the not properly considering the extent of our capacity, the not clearly distinguishing the things to which our ideas are suited, from those to which they are inadequate, that has made many men fall into an irksome scepticism, some into actual infidelity, and a few into the madness of atheism.

For what purpose was I born?—in what course of actions does the felicity of my nature consist?—am I author of these reputed actions, or am I a machine incessantly and irresistibly impelled to action, by external motives over which I have no control?—will my existence be terminated by death, or continued beyond it?—will the quality

of my future existence (if there should happen to be one) depend on my moral conduct here? These and other questions of similar import every man of reflection must, at one time or other, put to himself; and when he does put them, he will perceive that his reason is unequal to the clear solution of any of them. That Jesus Christ was born in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago—that he wrought miracles in that country—that he was crucified at Jerusalem—that he arose from the dead—that he ascended into heaven—that he enabled his disciples to work miracles, and commanded them to teach the world the doctrines which he had taught them—these are some of the main facts on which the truth of the Christian religion is founded. Now it appears to me to be a much easier matter to prove the truth of these facts, than to give, from reason, a satisfactory answer to any of the difficulties which I have mentioned.

In the ardour of youth, in the tumult of sensual passion, in the profligacy of dissipation, in the bustle of business, in the sordidness of avarice, in the loftiness of ambition, thoughts of such a serious cast may either not occur, or not

be regarded. But they will obtrude themselves on a bed of sickness at any period of life; they will surround the pillow of the unfortunate; they will penetrate the recesses of retirement, whether occasioned by a satiety of enjoyment, the chagrin of disappointment, or by any of the sad vicissitudes incident to every human station; and if they should arrest our notice on no other occasion, they will certainly steal upon us with the increase of our age, and generate, in those who reject christianity, no small perturbation, when the feebleness of declining life most requires tranquillity and consolation.

Be it our business then, as it is our duty and our interest, to confirm ourselves in the belief of that gospel by which all difficulties of this nature are done away. If that gospel be true, (as it certainly is,) we know for what purpose we are born—that we may live for ever. We know that we are not machines, but accountable for our actions, which machines cannot be. We know in what the felicity of our nature doth consist—in living *soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* We know that death is not *eter-*

nal sleep, but the commencement of everlasting life.

I conclude with recommending one observation to the serious attention of all unbelievers, who are sincerely desirous of becoming christians—that they would well consider the quality of the proof which the subject admits. The truth of the Christian religion is, as to us, founded on the reality of past transactions. Now past transactions are neither the objects of sense, nor of intuition, nor of demonstration; we cannot, correctly speaking, be said to know that they ever existed; but the probability, which is grounded on testimony, approaches, in many cases, so near to certainty, that our belief of past transactions is little different from knowledge itself. He who requires more than probability before he will embrace christianity, requires what the nature of the subject does not admit, and subverts the foundation of all history, sacred and profane. That Jesus wrought miracles in Judea, and arose from the dead at Jerusalem, are facts as capable of being ascertained, and as worthy of being credited, as that Cæsar lived at Rome, and was murdered in the capitol.

May the merciful Father of the whole human race, who, for reasons best known to his unsearchable wisdom, hath suffered many millions to die, and suffers many millions also now to live, in utter ignorance of that revelation of his will, which he hath given to the christian world, accept our humble thanksgivings for such an inestimable benefit! May he *establish, strengthen, settle* the inhabitants of these kingdoms in the faith of Christ; and be graciously pleased to remove from all others the *ignorance that is in them*, lest, *in being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, they become to every good work reprobate*; lest, *in being spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit*, they fall into perdition, temporal and eternal.

SERMON II.

2 Pet. i. 16.

WE HAVE NOT FOLLOWED CUNNINGLY DEVISED FABLES, WHEN WE MADE KNOWN UNTO YOU THE POWER AND COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BUT WERE EYE-WITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY.

WHETHER the Christian religion be a revelation of the will of God, or a cunningly devised fable, is a question which, one might think, every serious man would examine with impartial attention. He would take, it might be expected, the New Testament into his hand, and observing that it consisted of various parts, and had been written by different authors, he would inquire what evidence there was for its being a *genuine* book. If he found, as I am persuaded he would find, that there were as solid reasons for believing that the gospel of St. Luke, and the Acts of the Apos-

tles, were written by him, and the other parts of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are ascribed, as that the history of the Peloponnesian war was written by Thucydides, or the lives of the Cæsars by Suetonius; he would then inquire, whether the book was not only a genuine but an *authentic* one; that is, whether it contained a narration of events which had really taken place in Judea, near eighteen hundred years ago, or whether there was any reasonable cause to suspect that the authors of the New Testament had not honestly related what had really happened. With respect to the honesty of the writers, he would judge of that from their characters; and with respect to the reality of the facts mentioned by them, he would consider, that most of the writers of the New Testament did not relate what they had heard, but what they had seen; so that, if they were honest men, there could remain no doubt of the truth of what they had delivered. He would be ready to admit, that, as simple historians, they might, notwithstanding their honesty, have fallen into trivial mistakes in their narration of what they had seen; and that, notwithstanding their honesty, they might have been full of credulity, and liable to imposition; but he would

think it quite impossible, that facts of such public notoriety and importance as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, could have been the subjects either of human error, or credulity, in those who professed to have been eye-witnesses of what they related. He would therefore certainly conclude, that the Christian religion was true, if the writers of the New Testament were honest men.

If the writers of the New Testament were not honest men, they were impostors: now, that they were not impostors, may appear from considering—that they had neither motive to commence, nor ability to carry on an imposture—and from examining the account they give of themselves and of their associates, immediately before, and soon after the resurrection of Jesus.

Impostors are moved to the attempt of deceiving mankind by prospects of wealth, fame, power, pleasure; by some real or imaginary advantage to be derived to themselves, or, through them, to those whom they love and regard as themselves. Now no expectation of this kind can, with the least shadow of probability, be

ascribed to all, or to any of the writers of the New Testament. There is no need of entering into the proof of this; every one knows that Jews and Romans, Greeks and barbarians; that the powers of the world, wherever they went, were against the apostles; they durst not any where lift up so much as an arm in their own defence. Instead of temporal advantages of any kind, they had to expect, and they did in fact experience, hunger, and cold, and nakedness, and scorn, and contempt, and hatred, all the miseries incident to a state of poverty, all the calamities attendant on a state of religious persecution:—these are not the motives which induce men to become impostors.—Read the history of the impostor *Mahomet*, or that of *Alexander* as described by Lucian, or that of *Apollonius of Tyana*; and contrast them with that of Christ, or any of his apostles; and you will at once perceive the difference between the manner in which imposture and truth are introduced and established in the world. Compare the miracles recorded in the New Testament, with respect to their publicity, their beneficial tendency, and their influence on the thousands who saw them, with the tricks of ancient or modern pretenders to magic; and you

will at once perceive the difference between cunningly devised delusions operating on fanatical minds, and the simplicity of gospel wonders extorting conviction from the most incredulous. The apostles were as destitute of ability to deceive, as of inducement to impose a fable on the world. It requires great power, or great talents, to be a successful impostor; and the difficulty is increased, when the plot cannot be carried on without the concurrence of many assistants; and especially when it is to be carried on, in opposition to men able and willing to detect the cheat. What should we think of twelve fishermen, who should now undertake to proclaim, in the hearing of the learned and unlearned, that a few years ago a certain man wrought many miracles, not only in a distant country, but in the streets and churches of the metropolis of the kingdom; not only before them, the relaters of the fact, but in the presence of thousands of others; and that this man was publicly tried by order of government, and put to death in London; and that he rose from the dead; and that after his resurrection he was seen not only by themselves, but by hundreds of others, and by some who were still alive?—What should we think of such assertions,

of such audacious appeals to living witnesses, when in truth this man had not risen from the dead, nor wrought any miracle whatever? — What should we think of twelve fishermen, who, without understanding any language but their own, should go to Paris, Rome, Madrid, Constantinople, and endeavour to propagate the same thing? Is it credible that any men could be found so mad as to make the attempt, or that, if they did make it, they should have the good fortune to succeed in their imposition?

That a great part of the world is converted to christianity, is a fact;—that the foundation of this conversion was laid by the apostles, is another fact;—that the apostles were men of mean connections, slender talents, slow apprehensions; of powers, faculties, and dispositions, utterly inadequate to the introducing and supporting an imposture, are other facts, of which, when properly considered, we cannot, it is apprehended, suffer ourselves to doubt. If we admit the account, contained in the New Testament, concerning the means by which the Christian religion was established, every thing is credible; if we reject it, every thing is incredible; no satisfactory reason

can be assigned for the zeal, or for the
of the apostles in propagating an untrut
zeal will want a motive, and their succ
want a cause adequate to the effect.

Consider farther, that there is no book
the world, nor, as far as we know, ever w
contradicting any of the facts recorde
New Testament; but that there are severa
written by men who were not christians,
confirm many of them: *Tacitus*, in pa
confirms a fact of principal importance:
tells us, that Jesus Christ was put to d
Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea.—Tha
therefore any external testimony, that the
of the New Testament have written a fa
we refuse to believe their narration, our
if it has any foundation beside that of pr
and ignorance of the subject, must be l
something contained in the New Testam
self; now every thing related in the New
ment, and especially what is related con
the conduct of the apostles, before and a
resurrection of Jesus, carries with it the st
proof of the honesty of the writers of it;
they were honest men, the Christian religion

What would have been the conduct of dishonest men, who had combined to cheat the world into a belief of what had never happened, into the adoption of a new religion of which they themselves were to be the principal promoters? Would they have ever told to the world circumstances so disgraceful to their characters, as the evangelists have done? Impostors carefully conceal their ambition, their avarice, their cowardice, their insincerity, their vices and imperfections of every kind, and make an ostentatious display of virtues and excellencies which they do not really possess. But the evangelists, having no design to deceive, relate, without disguise, facts tending to lower their characters in the general estimation of mankind. They tell us that there was a strife among the apostles, which of them should be the greatest; and that, as interested and ambitious men are wont to do, they had all been very forward in professing to Jesus their strong attachment to him—"that if they should die with him, they would not deny him:"—they then proceed to inform us, disgraceful as the account is, that in a very few hours after they had made these solemn professions, when the moment of peril came, and their selfish views were blasted,—"they all for-

sook him and fled."—This humiliating narrative is a proof of their veracity as historians, and their conduct on the occasion is highly credible.

Notwithstanding the long intimacy which the apostles of Jesus had enjoyed with him; notwithstanding the distinction with which they had been honoured by him; notwithstanding the knowledge they had of the probity of his manners, of the purity of his doctrines, and of the greatness of his power in working miracles; notwithstanding the promise he had made them of his going to prepare a place for them in his Father's kingdom, of his rising from the dead, of his returning to them again, and of his not leaving them comfortless; notwithstanding these and many other circumstances, sufficient, one might at first view have imagined, to have generated courage, and secured attachment in all his followers, yet they all abandoned him in his distress —"forsook him and fled—the shepherd was smitten, and the sheep were scattered."

This conduct was extremely natural. The disciples of Jesus, and his apostles especially, expected that their Master would become a great

temporal prince, and that they were to participate in the power, wealth, and honour, which he would at length attain. But when they saw him seized by his enemies, and dragged as a malefactor before the great council of the nation, they not only gave up their hopes of advancement, but were alarmed for their own personal safety; they yielded to fears inseparable from humanity; and which are seldom overcome, except by persons impressed with high notions of honourable reputation. This conduct of the apostles is so entirely conformable to what we every day observe, that it forces, as it were, our assent to the truth of the narration. When the founder of a sect in religion, or the leader of a faction in the state, happens to fall into disgrace, his adherents presently begin to be shy of his acquaintance; and if he happens not merely to fall into disgrace, but to be arrested as a pestilent disturber of the public peace, then do they begin to avoid him, and if they cannot escape the suspicion of being known to him, they begin, especially if they be men of low education, to lie and to swear, as Peter did, that they know not the man, never had communication or connection with him.

his trial, as if drunk with fury, had cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him, his blood be on us and our children;" did this multitude (as is not unusual with multitudes to do) once more change their mind, and undertake the defence of the followers of that man, whom in their phrenzy they had murdered? No, we read nothing of the multitude becoming supporters of the apostles, till the wonders and signs which were done by them, brought fear on every soul; the support of the multitude was subsequent to the preaching of Peter and the apostles, it could not therefore have been the cause of their courage.—Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Christ, and a rich man; Nicodemus was a disciple of Christ, and a powerful man, for he was a ruler of the Jews; did these or any other men by their wealth or authority inspire the apostles with fortitude to face their enemies, and the enemies of their crucified Lord? No, nothing of this kind, but the contrary of it appears in the history; for it appears that the disciples, on the day of the resurrection, and for some days afterwards, were so full of apprehension, that they assembled privately, with the door of their apartment shut, for fear of the Jews. What was it then that

caused the apostles to change their cowardice into courage, their desertion into attachment, their aim at worldly advancement into a voluntary surrender of every worldly comfort, into a patient submission to every evil which could afflict human nature? What, but the conviction that their Lord was risen from the dead? This is a cause adequate to the effect; it is a misuse of time, and a perversion of talents, to seek for any other. This conduct of the apostles before and after the resurrection of their Lord, is a strong argument in support of the truth of our holy religion.

Let us consider more particularly the account which is given of their conduct. After the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostles were obliged to stay at Jerusalem at least a week, that they might keep the passover according to the law; during this period Jesus appeared twice to them, when they were assembled together. After the feast was ended, they returned to their native country, Galilee; and Jesus appeared to them, at the place he had before appointed; it is probable that he shewed himself frequently to them in that country, for he was seen of them forty

days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. On the approach of the feast of Pentecost, or the feast of weeks, which, according to the law, was to be kept at Jerusalem by all the Jews, fifty days after the celebration of the passover, the apostles went from Galilee to Jerusalem; and there they were again met by their Master; who commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they were endued with power from on high, till they were baptized by the Holy Ghost, which he assured them they would be in a little time. He gave them also their commission—"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.—And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight."—A few days after this, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and enabled to speak a variety of languages which they had never learned, and to work miracles surpassing all human power.

Now supposing the Scripture account of the resurrection of Jesus; of his frequently appear-

ing to his disciples after his resurrection; of his instructing them in the nature of his kingdom; of his giving them a commission to bear witness concerning him to all the world; of his ascending into heaven while they looked on him; of his sending the Holy Ghost, by which they were enabled to speak with tongues, and to work miracles; supposing these things to have really happened, what conduct would you have expected from the apostles? Precisely that which they adopted. They no longer denied their Master, no longer shut themselves up in secret, no longer feared the Jewish rulers, no longer disputed amongst themselves which of them should have the first place in the kingdom of Christ; but relinquishing all earthly comfort, setting at defiance all opposition, braving all persecution, they went through the world executing the commission they had received, every where maintaining—that Jesus of Nazareth, whilst he was alive, was a man proved to be from God, by miracles which God did by him; that God raised him from the dead; that after his resurrection they frequently conversed with him; that they saw him ascend into heaven; and that they received from him the power of speaking with tongues, and of working miracles.

Had Jesus Christ never risen from the dead, christianity would, probably, never have been extended beyond the limits of Judea. His disciples might have acquired a peculiar denomination, and would certainly have esteemed him a great prophet; but not *the* prophet, not the Messiah, whom they expected to come into the world. In the interval between his death and his resurrection, the minds of his apostles were perplexed with doubts concerning his being the person who was to restore Israel. They were so backward in crediting the reports which were brought to them of his resurrection, that it is evident, they either did not believe, or, in the tumult of their grief, did not advert to what he had told them of his rising again the third day; and it is very probable that, if he had not risen from the dead, his disciples would have contented themselves with reverencing, in secret, the memory of their Master; they could not have doubted concerning the reality of the miracles which they had seen him perform; but they would neither have had the courage to attempt the conversion of the world to a dead man, nor the means to effect it.

History affords many instances of men who have sustained with fortitude the greatest persecutions in support of opinions perfectly erroneous, as well as in support of those which are founded in truth. A Jew will sooner be tortured by the inquisition, and burned at the stake, than he will acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah. A Christian will suffer martyrdom, sooner than he will deny that Jesus is the Messiah. A Mahometan will sooner be put to death, than he will own Mahomet to have been an impostor; and both Jews and Christians will suffer any persecution sooner than they will acknowledge him to have been a prophet sent from God. It is not only in these great points that human fortitude triumphs over pain and death; but there is no christian sect which cannot boast of numbers who would seal, I do not say, the truth, but *their* opinion of the truth, with their blood. Servetus was burned to death, because he would not profess, that he believed Christ to be the eternal Son of God, though, in the midst of the flames, he professed that Christ was the Son of the eternal God:—and Calvin would have suffered the death which he made Servetus suffer, sooner than he

would have acknowledged, that Christ was not the eternal Son of the eternal God.—We learn from the history of fanaticism and superstition, that men have died martyrs to opinions unintelligible, absurd, immoral, impious. All this may be allowed, but the inference, which is generally drawn by sceptical men from such observations, cannot be allowed; the inference is this—that the fortitude of the apostles, in sustaining persecution, is no proof of the truth of the christian religion, inasmuch as an equal degree of fortitude has often been displayed by other men in support of opinions evidently not true.—This inference cannot be allowed, for this reason—that an essential difference is to be made between him who dies in attestation of a matter of fact, and him who dies in attestation of an opinion. The apostles died in attestation of their having seen Jesus work miracles, whilst he was alive; and of their having conversed with him after his resurrection from the dead. These are not abstruse opinions, but things which either did, or did not happen; any man is competent to say whether he saw them happen or not; and the apostles died in maintaining that they did see them happen: they "were eye-witnesses of his

majesty." The christian martyrs who had never seen Jesus, nor been eye-witnesses of any miracles wrought by him, or by others in his name, but who died, rather than they would abandon the belief which they had adopted, contributed, by their constancy, to the propagation of the christian religion; but they did not establish its truth in the same way that the apostles did.

The Christians of the present age are strong in opinion, that Jesus was raised from the dead—the Jews and unbelievers of the present age are strong in opinion, that Jesus was not raised from the dead. Christians and Jews, of all preceding ages, till we come to the very time when this great event—the resurrection of Jesus—either did or did not happen, have been uniform in their respective opinions, and both are now ready to shed their blood in support of them; there is no hypocrisy in the profession of either; what reason then has an impartial inquirer after truth to credit the Christian rather than the Jew?—He has this reason; the ground-work of the belief of the Christian is a matter of fact attested by eye-witnesses; but the ground-work of the belief of the Jew is an assertion destitute of proof. The Jews,

who lived at the time when Jesus either did or did not rise from the dead, found the sepulchre, in which his body had been laid, empty. The sepulchre might have become empty two ways, either by the body having been raised from the dead, or by its having been taken away. The Jews asserted that it was taken away by his disciples, but they gave no proof of their assertion; they neither pretended to have seen it taken away, nor to have seen it after it had been taken away. The apostles also found the sepulchre empty, but they did not, from that circumstance, assert, that Jesus was risen from the dead; no, they asserted that they had seen him, handled him, eaten with him, conversed with him, not only once, but often, and in different places, after his resurrection from the dead. Now, no one, who understands the nature of evidence, can hesitate in pronouncing, that the belief of the Christians of the present age, when traced back to its origin, is founded on a rock, on the testimony of eye-witnesses to a matter of fact; whilst that of the Jews is founded on an assertion of their ancestors not only destitute of proof, but utterly incredible, as might easily be shewn

from an examination of the circumstances attending the crucifixion and interment of Jesus.

Had the chief priests reported, that, in consequence of the precautions they had taken, the body of Jesus was on the third day after the crucifixion found in the sepulchre; and had the apostles reported, that on the third day the body was not found in the sepulchre, and said no more upon the subject; the Christians and Jews of succeeding ages might, with some appearance of reason, have disputed concerning the degree of credit due to the testimony of their respective progenitors. Yet even on this supposition, the Christian would have had a better foundation for his belief, than the Jew could lay claim to; for the predecessors of the Christian sacrificed their lives in support of their testimony, but the predecessors of the Jew gave no such proof of their sincerity and truth.

The sum of what has been said amounts to this—we have as great, if not greater reason to believe, that the history of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as related in the

New Testament, is a genuine and authentic history, as we have to believe in the genuineness and authenticity of any other ancient book—we have no evidence, external or internal, to induce us to conclude, that the apostles had either ability or motive to introduce and propagate an imposture. The selfishness, ambition, and cowardice of the apostles, shewn during the life, and at the death of Jesus, are perfectly natural and credible; and when contrasted with their subsequent disinterestedness, humility, and fortitude, afford an exceeding strong proof, both of the general veracity of the evangelists as historians, and of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, as a cause adequate to the production of so great, and otherwise unaccountable change in their character and conduct.

A

CHARGE,

DELIVERED TO THE

CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF LANDAFF,

IN JUNE, 1795.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE pleasure which I experience in meeting you on such occasions as the present, is always accompanied with some degree of anxiety. I am fearful, lest I should have nothing to produce to you worthy of your attention, as scholars, and divines; and I think too well of your general good conduct, in the discharge of your parochial duties, to employ the time in reprehending you for faults, which probably do not exist; or in cautioning you against errors, to which you probably are not prone.

On a former occasion I took the liberty of giving you my advice, on the necessity of your

thoroughly examining the foundation on which your faith, as Christians, is built; and I, at this time, repeat the advice with great earnestness and sincerity. An attack has been openly made in a foreign country, and is secretly carrying on in our own; not on modes of worship, or church discipline; not on disputable articles of faith; not on any of the out-works of christianity; but on the citadel itself. We know, indeed, that this citadel is founded on a rock, which no human force can subvert; yet we are placed in it as sentinels, to detect the artifice of those who covertly undermine, and to repel the aggression of those who openly assail it; and we know the punishment which awaits soldiers sleeping on their post.

There have been men in former ages, and there are not a few in our own, who think and speak of the clergy, as destitute either of understanding, or honesty; who represent them as interested in the support of a superstition; and ready, at all times, to sacrifice their probity as men, on the altar of professional hypocrisy; who stigmatize them as the protectors of ignorance, and the persecutors of science. A philosopher,

says *Helvetius*, has for his enemies, the bonzes, the dervises, the bramins, the ministers of every religion in the world. Let us forgive these philosophers, whether foreign or domestic, this wrong; but let us, at the same time, beg them to consider—that we, as well as they, are subjects of a free state, in which the road to wealth and distinction is open to every man of ability; and more open, perhaps, to men of ability in other professions, than in that of the church—that we, as well as they, enjoy talents from the gift of God, and have been as sedulous as themselves, (speaking without arrogance) in the improvement of them. Are they mathematicians, natural philosophers, metaphysicians, logicians, classical scholars? So are we.—I speak not of individuals, much less of myself, but of the great body of the British clergy. There is not a single branch of knowledge, in which the clergy are not equal, at least, to those who injuriously impute to them the grossness of ignorance in believing an imposture, or the more degrading and flagitious infamy of supporting what they do not believe.

It is true, that lawyers, physicians, soldiers, men in every profession, are wont to acquire a

partiality for that in which they have been educated; and, by the almost irresistible force of habit, think more highly of its excellencies, and are disposed to defend its defects with more pertinacity than reason will allow. If a prepossession of this kind should be observable in the professors of christianity, or in the advocates for any particular system of christianity, a candid mind would be ready rather to apologize for the infirmity, than to condemn it, as springing from a corrupted source of interest or ambition. What interest can an Unitarian or an Arian have in dissenting from the faith esteemed orthodox? If either, or both of them are in an error, may the mercy of God forgive them! but let not the unmerciful judgment of man condemn them.—What interest can a deist of upright morals (and there are many such) have in contending, that the Supreme Being gave no law to Moses, no revelation of his will to mankind by Jesus Christ; but that Moses and the prophets, that Jesus and the apostles, were like Confucius, Zoroaster, Numa, Mahomet, and their several associates; that they pretended to a divine authority, which was not vouchsafed to them? We believe, that the divine missions of Moses and

of Jesus may be established, and that they have been repeatedly established, by arguments, which are utterly inapplicable to every other religion which hath taken place among mankind; but we do not take upon us to anathematize, with fiery zeal, every one who does not believe as we do; we pray for his conversion to what we esteem the truth, and we request him to admit, that the sincerity of our belief in christianity is as great as that of his unbelief; if he thinks otherwise of us, he thinks amiss; if he speaks otherwise, he becomes a calumniator.

This moderation, which, on all occasions, I recommend as proper for us to observe towards those who differ from us, either partially, or wholly, and which, in return, we have a right to expect from them, is not to be interpreted into an indifference either towards christianity in general, or towards that particular mode of it which is established in these kingdoms. The church of England may be maintained, and it is our duty to maintain it, with zeal regulated by charity, against all its enemies, till they have convinced us, that a less defective system of doctrine, worship, and discipline, might be peaceably intro-

duced in its stead; and this, if we may judge from what we have read of former times, or observed of our own, the opposers of the establishment will not be able speedily to accomplish.

He who wishes to repair an ancient fortress, when he sees it attacked by a thousand enemies, disfigured by the rubbish of a thousand ages, cannot, without great injustice, be ranked with those who labour to overturn it.

Nor is the defence of the Christian religion abandoned, when we allow unbelievers the full liberty of producing all the arguments they can in support of their infidelity. Our liberality in this respect proceeds not from any supineness, or inattention towards what we esteem of inestimable value, but from a total dislike of dogmatism and intolerance;—principles ill comporting with the weakness of human understanding, and with the benignity of the Christian religion; and from a strong persuasion that the result of the most critical scrutiny into the foundations of our faith will be a confirmation of its truth. The time I think is approaching, or is already come, when Christianity will undergo a more severe in-

vestigation than it has ever yet done. My expectation, as to the issue, is this—that catholic countries will become protestant, and that protestant countries will admit a farther reformation. —In expressing this expectation, which I am far from having the vanity to propose with oracular confidence, I may possibly incur the censure of some, who think that protestantism, as established in Germany, in Switzerland, in Scotland, in England, is, in all these, and in other countries, so perfect a system of Christianity, that it is incapable of any amendment in any of them. If this should be the case, I must console myself with reflecting, that the greatest men could not, in their day, escape unmerited calumny. Every age has had its Sacheverells, its Hickes's, and its Chenells's; who, with the bitterness of theological odium, sharpened by party rancour, have not scrupled to break the bonds of christian charity. Hoadly was called a dissenter, Chillingworth a Socinian, and Tillotson both Socinian and atheist; and all of them experienced this obloquy, from contemporary zealots, on account of the liberality of their sentiments, on account of their endeavouring to render Christianity more rational than it was in certain points generally esteemed

to be. I had certainly rather submit to imputations, which even these great men could not avoid, than be celebrated as the mightiest champion of the church on the system of intolerance, or the most orthodox contender for the faith on the system of those who maintain, that our first reformers have left us no room for improvement in scriptural learning. With whatever assurance other men may be persuaded, that they have attained certain knowledge of the truth of all Christian doctrines; with whatever zeal, in consequence of that persuasion, they may foster the seeds of persecution, I confess that there are many points in theology on which I feel myself disposed to adopt an expression of St. Austin, when he is stating the different ways, in which he conjectures that original sin may have been propagated from parents to children—*quid autem horum sit verum libentius disco, quam dico, ne audeam docere quod nescio.*

Herodotus tells us, that *Darius* asked some of the Greeks, what sum of money he should give them to eat the bodies of their deceased parents, after the manner of the Indians. Upon their refusal to comply on any consideration, he asked

some of the Indians, who were accustomed to eat the bodies of their parents, what sum they would take to burn the bodies of their parents after the Grecian manner: but they, setting up a general outcry, desired the king to have better thoughts of them. Thus it is in religion, every man is attached to the mode of worship, and the system of doctrines, to which he has been accustomed, and he looks upon other modes, and other doctrines, as bordering on impiety. This disposition is so general, that it may be considered as natural; yet, like many other natural propensities, it may be corrected; it is an evil which may be overcome by good sense. I call it an evil, because it misleads the judgment, and subjects men to the tyranny of prejudice. It was a prejudice of this sort which made St. Paul a persecutor of Jesus; which made the Jews persecutors of the Christians; which made the heathens persecutors of both Jews and Christians; and which has, at times, rendered the different denominations of Christians in this country, and in all other parts of Christendom, persecutors of each other. There can be no question that it is the duty of all men to oppose reason to prejudice; but, unluckily, every man thinks that he does so; he mistakes his own

conclusions for truths, which ought not to be disputed, and which cannot be illustrated; and every argument tending to subvert them is rejected without examination. This perversion of the understanding is a great reproach to men of education and learning; we may lament it and excuse it in the bulk of mankind, who, letting their reason lie without exercise, go, on most occasions, in matters of opinion, not in the way in which they ought to go, but in that which they have gone before. But in men habituated to the cultivation of their faculties, and to impartial investigation in other branches of knowledge, this prepossession in religion, the most important of all branches, is wholly reprehensible.

The great disputes which at present agitate Europe, respect the first principle of natural religion, and the truth of all revealed religion. The first principle of natural religion is—the existence of a God, the maker, the preserver, and the moral governor of the universe. No created being can comprehend the essence of the divine nature, much less is it in the power of man to do it; but to deny the existence of a God, is such a degree of insanity, as few men in any age have

fallen into; and those who have fallen into it, have been deservedly looked upon as dangerous prodigies in nature.

Protagoras, a philosopher of antiquity, we are told by *Cicero*, began a work with saying—"Whether there are gods, or whether there are none, I have nothing certain to deliver on the subject." The Athenians, fired with indignation at this daring declaration of the sophist's scepticism, banished him from their city and territory, and burned his book before a public assembly of the people. In our days, a philosopher has been heard to exclaim, in a solemn convention of his countrymen, "I am an atheist." Far from resenting this public avowal of his impiety, his countrymen called out, "What is that to us? you are an honest man." I do not deny the possibility of an atheist being an honest man—*Spinoza* is said to have been one—and I am an enemy to every degree of persecution for opinion; but surely the people of Athens manifested, on a similar occasion, not only more piety, but infinitely more political wisdom, than the people of Paris—for there has yet been no instance in the world, of a state subsisting without religion.

I think it unnecessary to enter into any laboured proof of the Being and Providence of God before this audience; it is known, I presume, to every one of you, my brethren, that the existence of a Supreme Being may be established from three different sources of argumentation—from a metaphysical consideration of the absurdity of an infinite series of dependent beings—from the contemplation of the order and beauty of the universe—and from the consent of all nations; which consent has been derived by tradition from our first parents. Many writers, ancient and modern, have maintained, that the idea of God was implanted in our nature; they were driven to this expedient, which Mr. Locke has shewn to have no foundation, from their not having been able otherwise to account for that universal consent, which prevailed not amongst the learned only, but amongst the unlearned part of mankind, concerning the Being of a God. Had they been acquainted with, or properly considered the writings of *Moses*, they would have seen the great facility with which a knowledge of the creation, and of the existence of God, might have been disseminated throughout the world, by the descendants of *Noah*. All mankind are sprung

from a common stock, and all have retained, as might have been expected, some knowledge of the cause of their common origin. There was a time when I was fond of metaphysical inquiries into the nature of the Supreme Being, and much delighted with the works of *Cudworth*, *King*, *Clarke*, *Leibnitz*, and other acute reasoners on the subject; but I have long thought that the motions of the heavenly bodies, the propagation and growth of animals and plants, the faculties of the human mind, and even the ability of moving my hand up or down, by a simple volition, afford, when deliberately reflected on, more convincing arguments against atheism, than all the recondite lucubrations of the most profound philosophers. In a word, the argument for the existence of God, which is drawn from the contemplation of nature, is so clear and so strong, that the most ignorant can comprehend it, and the most learned cannot invent a better. This argument is so obvious to a thinking mind, that I suspect the accuracy of *Cicero*'s information, when he tells us that *Anaxagoras* was the first, who taught that the universe was formed by an intelligent mind, distinct from matter. He himself, indeed, gives reason for this suspicion, when

he observes, that *Thales*, the predecessor of *Anaxagoras*, maintained (probably from some tradition concerning the creation) that God was that mind which formed all things out of water. I will conclude this head with a passage from *Chardin's* travels into *Persia*, as cited by *Fabricius*; it may be better remembered, as an argument against atheism, than a more acute disquisition would be.

The Mahometans, says this author, have invented many fabulous accounts concerning the prophets and the patriarchs of the Old Testament; amongst the rest, they tell us—that *Moses* having preached a long time to king Pharaoh, who was an atheist and a tyrant, on the existence of one eternal God, and on the creation of the world; and finding that he made no impression either upon Pharaoh or his courtiers; ordered a fine palace to be erected privately, at a considerable distance from a country residence of the king. It happened that the king, as he was hunting, saw this palace, and inquired by whom it had been built. None of his followers could give him any information; at length Moses came forward, and said to him—that the palace must certainly have built itself. The king fell a laughing at his

absurdity, telling him that it was a pretty thing for a man, who called himself a prophet, to say that such a palace had built itself in the middle of a desert. Moses interrupted him with saying, "You think it a strange extravagance to affirm that this palace built itself, the thing being impossible; and yet you believe that the world made itself. If this fine palace, which is but an atom in comparison, could not spring from itself in this desert, how much more impossible is it that this world, so solid, so great, so admirable in all its parts, could be made by itself, and that it should not, on the contrary, be the work of an Architect wise and powerful!" The king was convinced, and worshipped God, as Moses had instructed him to do. There is much good sense in this fable, and its substance is thus expressed by Cicero—*quod si mundum efficere potest concursus atomorum, cur porticum, cur templum, cur domum, cur urbem non potest?*

When we speak concerning the truth of revealed religion, we include not only the certainty of the divine missions of Moses and of Jesus, but the nature of the several doctrines promulgated by them to mankind. Now you may ask

me, what these doctrines are? I know what they are to me; but, pretending to no degree of infallibility, I think it safer to tell you where they are contained, than what they are. They are contained in the Bible; and if, in the reading of that book, your sentiments concerning the doctrines of Christianity should be different from those of your neighbour, or from those of the church, be persuaded on your part, that infallibility appertains as little to you, as it does to the church of which you are a member, or to any individual who differs from you. Towards the church you ought to preserve reverence and respect; and in your public teaching, you ought not, whilst you continue a minister in it, to disturb the public peace, by opposition to its doctrines; and towards individuals of whatever denomination of Christians they may be, who differ from you, you ought to preserve charity of thought, and courtesy of conduct; and if you do this, your discordance of opinion will be attended with no mischief public or private.

Many learned men have bestowed much useless labour in defining, what are the fundamental verities of the Christian religion; useless I esteem

it, because the same things are not fundamental to all men, and there is no infallible judge of controversy to settle the disputes which may arise. A papist believes the doctrine of transubstantiation, of worshipping of images, of invocation of saints, of purgatory, of the insalvability (if the word may be admitted) of heretics, and of the infallibility of popes, councils, and churches, to be fundamental doctrines:—a protestant does not believe any of these doctrines to be fundamental. Protestants differ from each other in their sentiments concerning the eucharist, concerning the Trinity, concerning satisfaction, original sin, and personal predestination;—but the wisest amongst them do not esteem any particular opinion concerning any of these points, to be so fundamentally right, that salvation will not belong to those who think otherwise.

Personal predestination appears to many to be a doctrine full of impiety and despair. They think it impious, as it represents God to be a blind or malignant being—blind, if he dooms a man to eternal destruction without knowing whether he will do good or evil; and malignant, if, knowing, he makes no distinction, in his decrees, be-

tween them who obey and them who disobey him. They think it a doctrine pregnant with despair—for now to be persuaded that you are inevitably doomed to everlasting punishment, that no future rectitude of conduct, no penitence for what is past, no supplication, no intercession, nothing which can be done by yourself, or by any other for you, can in the least avail to the altering of your fate; what is this, say they, but to overwhelm the soul with the blackness of despondent horror? Is it not, they ask, a more impious doctrine than that of Epicurus? for that represented God as not troubling himself in the government of the world, as making no distinction between the righteous and the wicked, as suffering both to die and become extinct; but this represents him, as consigning to everlasting torments, those whom he had from all eternity determined to condemn. This doctrine, which St. *Chrysostom* amongst the ancients, and *Arminius* amongst the moderns, reprobated as unworthy of God, has been zealously maintained by *Calvin* and St. *Austin*. In my humble judgment, they have done great service to Christianity, who have endeavoured to shew that it is not founded in Scripture. For nothing has contributed more to the propagation of deism,

than the making doctrines abhorrent fron
parts of the Christian system. There ma
trines above reason; but nothing, whi
dently contrary to reason, can ever l
considered as a part of the Christian
tion.—I will instance in another point.

A deist stumbles at the very threshol
gion, and turns with scorn and terror
temple of God, when he is told that h
enter into it but through the gate of ori
as described by *Fulgentius*, the discipl
Austin. He admits original sin in a certa
acknowledging that it is not contrary t
that the whole human race should, from t
gression of Adam, become subject to lab
ease, and death; but he bids us comb
one idea whatever we have read of th
chean doctrine concerning an evil prin
the sanguinary tenets of the worshipper
loch, of the cruel superstitions of paga
every age and country; and he defies us
any thing so hideous to imagination, s
nant to reason, so destructive of every
tion of a Supreme Being, as the doctrin
orthodox father of the Christian church,

ing original sin. The doctrine, in the words of Fulgentius, stands thus—*firmissime tene, et nullatenus dubites, parvulos, sive in uteris matrum vivere incipiunt et ibi moriuntur, sive cum de matribus nati sine sacramento sancti baptismatis de hoc seculo transeunt, ignis æterni sempiterno supplicio puniendos.*—Parent of universal good! merciful Father of the human race! how hath the benignity of thy nature been misrepresented! how hath the gospel of thy Son been misinterpreted by the burning zeal of presumptuous man! I mean not, on this occasion, to enter into the various questions which learned men have too minutely discussed, concerning the lapse of our first parents, the original rectitude, and subsequent depravation of human nature; I simply mean to say, that a proposition which asserts, that infants dying in the womb will be tormented in everlasting fire, on account of Adam's transgression, is a proposition so entirely subversive of all our natural notions of the justice and mercy of the Supreme Being, that it cannot be admitted, unless a passage in Scripture could be produced, in which it is clearly, and in so many words revealed; and I am certain that no such passage can be produced.

The gospel was preached to the poor, to ignorant and unlearned men; its leading doctrines concerning providence, a resurrection from the dead, and a future state of retribution, are so obvious, that no one who can read the Scriptures can fail to see them. Can it be a matter of surprise, then, that a reluctance is felt against the admission of abstruse doctrines, which require the subtlety of argute logic, and scholastic disquisition, to discover and enforce them? When men are desirous of forming systems, they are apt to collect together a number of texts, which, being taken as abstract propositions, seem to establish the point; but which, when interpreted by the context, appear to have no relation to it. There is no greater source of error than this practice; it has prevailed in the Christian church from the earliest ages, and it still prevails. We owe to it the corruptions of popery, and that infinity of heresies, which have so much debased the simplicity of gospel-truth, and driven so many men of sense from embracing Christianity. I am far from considering unbelievers as devoid of ability, or of integrity. I think they have not given the subject an unprejudiced and serious examination; and that the principal matters to which

they object are the doctrines of men, rather than the commands of God. Every one who will well weigh the subject, must perceive the unfairness with which men usually proceed, in forming systems in theology. By stringing together detached sentences, an *Ausonius* may compel the chaste *Virgil* to furnish materials for an indecent poem; and, from the Bible itself, a system of impiety might, by such means, be extracted.

But there is no doctrine of our holy religion, which has given greater offence to unbelievers, or occasioned greater perplexity to sincere christians, than the doctrine of satisfaction. Why might not God have restored human kind to the immortality which was lost by the transgression of Adam, without requiring any atonement, satisfaction, or price of redemption? Can the benevolent Author of the universe be induced, by the death of an innocent being, to bestow a blessing on mankind, which, without such a sacrifice, he would have withheld from them? Does God Almighty, like the demons of pagan superstition, delight in blood?—These, and innumerable other questions such as these, obtrude themselves on the reluctant minds of pious and think-

ing men; and they are the rocks on which impious and unthinking men make shipwreck of their faith. There is one general answer which may be given to them all; and it is an answer in which intelligent and sober men will acquiesce—our incapacity to comprehend the ways of the Almighty.—What mortal knoweth for what we are reserved in another world? Who can describe the means requisite for exalting our present human nature to that degree of angelic excellence, without which it may not be possible for us to participate in the joys of heaven? Who hath such an insight into the past, present, and future dispensations of God—into the relation which this state bears to a future one—into the connection which the human race may *now* have, though unknown to us, or may hereafter have, though it hath not now, with other orders of beings, as positively to pronounce, that the blood of Christ was not requisite to remove from mankind the consequences of Adam's transgression? We know assuredly, that God delighteth not in blood; that he hath no cruelty, no vengeance, no malignity, no infirmity of any passion in his nature; but we do not know, whether the requisition of an atonement for transgression, may

not be an *emanation of his infinite mercy*, rather than a *demand of his infinite justice*. We do not know, whether it may not be the very best means of preserving the innocence and happiness, not only of us, but of all other free and intelligent beings. We do not know, whether the suffering of an innocent person may not be productive of a degree of good, infinitely surpassing the evil of such sufferance; nor whether such a *quantum* of good could by any other mean have been produced. The death of Christ was voluntary; he laid down his own life, that he might give life to all mankind. This, no doubt, was a great instance of his love, and is a great motive for our gratitude, and ought to be a great incentive to holiness of life, since transgression was expiated by so great a sacrifice. But was God cruel, unmerciful, unjust in accepting this voluntary suffering of Christ as an instrument of our salvation? No, certainly; this must not be admitted, unless it could be shewn, which never can be shewn, that our salvation could have been accomplished, and to the same extent, by other less valuable means—unless it could be shewn, which never can be shewn, that more evil than good, either to Christ himself, to the human race,

or to some other part of God's creation, has flowed from the death of Christ. I like not that arrogant theology, which presumes to explore what *angels desire to look into*, and which, failing in its attempt, rejects as absurd what it is not able to understand.

If God thought fit to accept for our redemption any price, there is nothing, that we know of, but his own wisdom which could determine what price he would accept. Hence I see no difficulty in admitting, that the death of an angel, or of a mere man, might have been the price which God fixed upon. The *Socinians* contend that Christ was a man, who had no existence before he was born of Mary; but they seem to me not to draw a just consequence, when from thence they infer, that an atonement could not have been made for the sins of mankind by the death of Jesus. The *Arians* maintain, that Jesus had an existence before he was born of Mary; and there is no reason for thinking, that the death of such a being might not have made an atonement for the sins of mankind. All depends on the appointment of God; and if, instead of the death of a super-angelic, of an angelic, or of an human be-

ing, God had fixed upon any other instrument, as a medium of restoring man to immortality, it would have been highly improper in us to have quarrelled with the mean which his goodness had appointed, merely because we could not see how it was fitted to attain the end. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life:—he sent him into the world to be a propitiation for our sins;* and it is our duty to believe that the death of Christ was the fittest *ransom* which could have been provided for our *redemption*, though we may not be able, from our great ignorance, fully to comprehend its peculiar expediency.

With great humility, and self-abasement, does it become us to think and speak of every dispensation of God; we cannot fathom the depth of his councils, we cannot reach the sublimity of his designs, we cannot apprehend the wisdom of the means by which he worketh out the happiness of the universe. In fine, my brethren, it is our duty freely to examine the meaning of the words in which God has revealed his will, lest we should be led, by the authority of men, to adopt super-

stitious opinions as divine truths; but it is not consistent with good sense, to reject every thing which we cannot comprehend; the extent of our intellectual capacity is extremely circumscribed, and we fall into a dangerous delusion, when we affect to make it commensurate with the wisdom of the Almighty; *thinking ourselves to be something, when* in fact *we are nothing, we deceive ourselves*, and lead others into error.

THE END.

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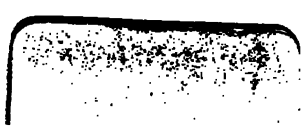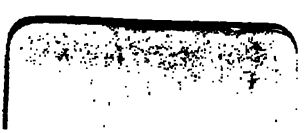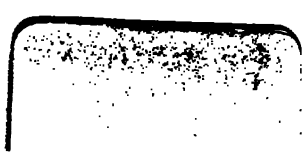
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